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"I HAVE NEVER LOVED ANY WOMAN BUT YOURSELF. I NEVER SHALL," SAID LORD BARRY, WITH SUPPRESSED EMOTION.

HOMEWARD BOUND.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

It was Wednesday, the day noted in Table Bay for a good many years as that fixed for the weekly departures of the English mail steamers. It was, we repeat, a Wednesday in the height of the African summer, which means the middle of January, and a young man stood in the public sitting-room of an hotel near the docks, regarding the clock with rather impatient eyes.

Jim Bradley was twenty-five, and he was "going home," as Colonials term it, for the first time in his life. The said life had not been particularly happy or prosperous. His father, the younger son of an aristocratic English family, was an out-and-out ne'er-do-well, nothing prospered with him, and the only thing he had a faculty for was getting in debt. He had married twice, and there were a dozen young Bradleys of all ages and sizes, about whose prospects the less said the better.

The ne'er-do-well lived some hundreds of miles away from Cape Town, and was much opposed to his son's journey; but three unexpected deaths had made him heir to the family honours, and with the supine selfishness which characterised him he was willing to join with his brother in cutting off the entail in consideration of a good round sum of ready money.

Mrs. Bradley No. 2 aided and abetted, knowing in all human probability her reckless reprobate of a husband would die before his brother, and said the evil old ne'er-do-well should not have things quite his own way. Jim (Mr. Maitland continued) ought to go to England and see after his rights; when his uncle saw the sort of young fellow he was helping to despoil, he might think better of it, and Mr. Maitland, who was an open-handed man, produced a hundred pounds, which would be sufficient to pay his young

friend's return passage, and allow, perhaps, twenty-five pounds for sight-seeing in England.

Mr. Bradley, senr., was furious, but Jim did not think himself bound to follow the wishes of a father who had never done anything for him he could help. There was one reason, and only one, which made him reluctant to leave the colony, and that he mentioned to Mr. Maitland in a low voice.

"There's Honor," he said, gravely; "don't you think for her sake I'm bound to stay here?"

"No, I don't," said Mr. Maitland, shrewdly. "I shall be here, Jim, and I can do as much or more for the poor girl than you can. You get to England as quick as you can and see after your inheritance, I'll look after Honor."

Jim had reached the quiet well-ordered hotel where Mr. Maitland advised him to put up, two nights before, and had made the most of his time in seeing the lions of the metropolis, for to a loyal Africander Cape Town is a wonderful city. His passage had been taken days before, and he had meant to go on board very early that morning; only as he sat at breakfast a telegram was put into his hand from his benefactor—

"Wait at hotel till I come."

So Jim was waiting, all his luggage except a small handbag, was on board. The clock pointed to one, the vessel was announced to sail at two sharp, and the young man's nervous impatience was getting almost beyond his control.

What if Mr. Maitland delayed him till the ship had sailed? a week must elapse before he could begin his journey, and before he reached England his uncle might have signed those fatal papers; besides, what could his benefactor possibly have to say, and why could he not have made the rendezvous on the deck of the *Spaniard*. Jim was getting almost desperate. The quarter after one struck, he began to think all hope gone when a carriage stopped at the hotel, and a smiling coloured waiter came to tell Mr. Bradley a gentleman was waiting for him. The waiter appreciated the need for haste, he took up the bag and carried it after him. The young man heard Mr. Maitland's voice say,—

"Jump in, there's no time to lose," and they were fairly off before, Jim had given a glance to Mr. Maitland's companion.

By the old merchant's side and opposite Jim, sat a lady, who, in spite of the intense heat, was closely veiled; something in the shape of the graceful head seemed familiar to Jim, and the one word escaped him,—

"Honor!"

"Yes," said Mr. Maitland, speaking for his silent charge, "she reached Sandstone only twenty-four hours after you left it. It was not safe for her to remain there. We posted sixty miles to catch the mail train. I wired to engage a cabin for her on the *Spaniard*; and now, under your care, she will be able to travel safely to England."

"Honor!" There was a world of love and tenderness in the young man's tone. "The blessing of having you again!"

She found her voice then.

"It was very kind of Mr. Maitland. He has done everything for me, Jim. I got to the old house without a shilling, and —"

"And Mrs. Bradley refused her shelter," went on the merchant. "Luckily, she came to us, and my wife's wit is as quick as her heart is warm. We soon decided the only thing to be done. The wife must give out Honor was at our house, but ill in bed, and she and I would cut across country till we caught the mail train. It was an awful rush. We hadn't time to go shopping," she smiled a little awkwardly. "I'm afraid the passengers may be a little curious; but you must give out you lived in a quiet upcountry town, where people didn't dress much. Luckily, you aren't likely to meet anyone you know. Your true Colonial never goes to England in January if he can help it. I shall look to see you back in three months' time, Jim, to tell us how you've fared, but for Honor it's different;" and he cast a kind pitiful glance at the girl. "If you can get on anyhow with your father's people you'd best leave her behind you."

Jim nodded. He pressed his sister's hand, and muttered a hoarse "thank you!" to their kind friend.

"Not a bit of it," replied Mr. Maitland. "I'm glad to have a hand in helping you. I've no children of my own left, and my one girl would have been just Honor's age if she'd lived. Besides, I remember your mother, Jim, and a bonny creature she was too, when your father first brought her to Sandstone."

"If people are curious had I better tell them my business in England? As things are I don't want to make enemies."

Mr. Maitland thought a moment.

"There's nothing freezes people more than baffling their curiosity; but you mustn't say too much. You might just mention, if you're hard pressed, you're going home about a property you believe you're heir to. That'll satisfy them and betray nothing."

They were at the docks. A coloured man seized Jim's bag, and a portmanteau so small and light Jim hoped instinctively it was not all Honor's luggage. Then they went on board, and Mr. Maitland, who had made a voyage himself in the *Spaniard* not so many months before, found himself cordially greeted by the Captain,

and seized the opportunity to introduce his companions.

"Mr. Bradley and his sister, Captain Fraser; young friends of mine, just going for a look at the old country, and not at all used to travelling." This last in an undertone. "If you'll do anything you can for them I shall take it as a great favour."

Captain Fraser looked at his new acquaintances as he shook hands with them, and promised his good offices.

He saw a tall sunburnt young man with light brown curly hair and good honest blue eyes—a gentleman, the Captain decided, promptly, though not at all used to fashion or society, he was favourably impressed with Jim; but he was simply amazed when he looked at Jim's sister.

For Honor was so beautiful it seemed impossible any mother, even a Colonial (and the prejudices of Colonials are not very keen) should have allowed her to travel across the ocean with no better escort than her brother's. Surely with a little effort Mrs. Bradley might have found a lady among the passengers to undertake the charge.

Captain Fraser thought the girl a great contrast to her brother.

Jim was tall and fair, Honor dark and decidedly under middle height. Her jet black hair had been cut short as though after some long illness, and nestled in little rings or curls round her head, a few straying on to her broad white brow.

Her eyes were the exact shade of big purple pansies, and her complexion was exquisitely clear and delicate, as though summer sun and hot winds alike had been unable to mar it.

But the difference between brother and sister went further still. Jim was very cheerful looking. Merriment and love of fun shone in every feature of his face. He was well-dressed too, and looked in easy circumstances; but Honor's face was so sad one expected the beautiful eyes to dissolve in tears, and her plain cotton dress had been washed so often that it looked faded and quite out of keeping with the elegant black lace bonnet and veil. Captain Fraser felt perplexed; though not a romantic man he would have staked a great deal there was some mystery about his latest arrived passenger.

"You've run it pretty close," he said good temperedly. "In ten minutes time the warning bell will ring."

Mr. Maitland looked rather pleased than otherwise.

"You don't call at the islands, I think?"

"No; we steam straight to Madeira. I shall be there in a fortnight, then on to Southampton. Nineteen or twenty days and your young friends will be safe on English ground."

He fancied that Miss Bradley echoed the word "safe," in a tone of longing expectation; but he would not be sure. He had other people to attend to and moved off.

"Have you enough money, Jim?" asked Mr. Maitland. "Shall I give you another twenty?"

Jim shook his head gratefully.

"You have done too much for us already, sir. We shall do very well."

"And when I am once in England I shall be able to work," breathed Honor. "I can earn my own living there; but oh, Mr. Maitland, I shall never forget all you have done for me. I shall bless you all my life."

"Tut, tut, my dear," said the merchant, lightly. "It's little enough. Some of these days when Jim is a big wig in the old country, Mrs. Maitland and I will take a run over and look at you in all your glory. Send your brother back at the end of three months, Honor; but stay away yourself. It seems an unkind counsel, child; but it's the best advice I can give you." She looked up at him with her eyes full of tears.

"I know," she whispered, in a kind of choked voice. "England is so big there must be room to hide me there."

The bell sounded, there was a general hum of farewell, and sound of women's tears, and then the last of those who were merely "visitors," left the deck, and in a few minutes a strange sense of motion told Honor the voyage had actually begun.

She and Jim stood by one side of the ship watching the harbour from which they were rapidly departing. His hand rested half-carelessly on her shoulder, and he said, fondly,—

"It makes this voyage just perfect, Honor, the having you."

She drew a long breath that was more than half a sigh.

"When I got to Sandstone and found you gone, Jim, I felt ready to despair."

"I never would have gone, only Mr. Maitland promised to do all he could for you."

"It's hard," she said, brokenly. "Why didn't we have a father like him who would have loved us and tried to make us happy instead of—"

"It won't mend things to talk so, dear," replied Jim, gently.

"When I heard how he was trying to rob you, my blood boiled, Jim," she cried, passionately. "Was it nothing that he had made my life a living martyrdom, that he must try and defraud you of your birthright?"

Jim bent a little closer to her and whispered a question. She shuddered as she answered.

"I expect so. I have no doubt he got to Sandstone very soon after I left it. Oh, Jim, while we were standing here talking to Mr. Maitland, the minutes seemed like hours, I was so afraid of his coming before we were safely off."

"You can be at ease now, child," said her brother, affectionately; "for a whole fortnight we are safe from letters and telegrams. Now, hadn't you better go below, and see what accommodation there is for you? If your cabin isn't comfortable, we might change. Mine was secured a week ago."

"And mine, yesterday," she said, simply. "Mr. Maitland wired. But the meanest shelter would be paradise to me, Jim."

As Mr. Maitland had observed, there were very few people homeward bound at this time of year. The *Spaniard* could carry over a hundred first-class passengers; on this voyage she had less than thirty, so Honor found herself the sole possessor of a very pleasant cabin near the saloon, and with that coveted prize of lady voyagers, a port-hole; and found, moreover, that most of the passengers being of the sterner sex the stewards had ample time to attend to her few charges.

Left alone, Honor flung herself on to the narrow couch which ran down one side of the tiny cabin, and sobbed as though her heart would break, she could not help it, the reaction after all she had suffered was too great. For three years her life had been one long pain; now, at last, a light seemed breaking between the clouds; now, at last, she could dare to look forward to the future, while, for the present, it was happiness enough to know she was with her dearly-loved brother, and that every hour was taking her further away from Africa, the land where she had suffered so cruelly.

CHAPTER II.

THERE must be a black sheep in every family, tradition informs us, and the father of Jim and Honor Bradley occupied that unenviable post among his relations, the Normans, of Normanhurst, a fine old place in Hertfordshire.

The youngest of three brothers, he had been his mother's idol, and, perhaps, her early spoiling had something to do with his many faults.

Before he was twenty he had been expelled from school and college. Two years later he was engaged in such disreputable proceedings on the turf that all the respectable of his racing associates fought shy of him; and his father, roused at last to the scandal brought upon the old name, offered the scapegrace his youngest son's portion of five thousand pounds at once, on condition he left England and dropped the name of Norman.

Cyril took the matter lightly, he always said one name was as good as another; he would go to the Australian gold fields, just then in full fame, and, when he had made his fortune, no doubt his relations would be glad to welcome him home again.

He never got to Australia, on the way out he

met an invalid gentleman taking a voyage to the Cape for his health, accompanied by a very pretty daughter. Cyril married the daughter, only to discover when the father died at Cape Town that his considerable means had been derived from an annuity which died with him, and Mrs. Cyril Bradley had not a sovereign to call her own.

But she was a woman of great beauty and clear intellect, and if she had lived things never would have come to such a pass with her husband. It was she who caused her two children to be registered in their true names, and described as the son and daughter of Cyril Bradley Norman. It was she who insisted that notice of their birth should be sent "home" to Normanhurst. It was she, finally, who obtained for her husband the post of town librarian at Sandstone, with a salary of a hundred a year.

It was about the only thing he was fit for. A voracious reader, he managed to get through every book added to the library and to recommend the right kind to each subscriber. Careless gossip about town affairs was quite in his scope, and, as an underling was allowed, he contrived to push all the hard mechanical work—and accounts—on to him.

Certainly he broke out again and again into fits of dissipation, but people in Sandstone had grown used to him and disliked change. Again and again the committee warned him, but they still kept him on, and he might have been librarian of Sandstone still, only after his first wife's death he married a pretty, indolent Colonial who thought chance better than a small certainty, and persuaded him to throw up his post of librarian and become canvasser to a newly-started wine association.

Other agencies followed, Bradley having an eloquent manner and good address he was well suited to the work. If he could have kept steady he might have done well, but he never stuck to anything long enough, and by the time the children of his first marriage grew up, he had tried everything, and lived from hand to mouth on what trifling commission he could secure from his old employers, the wine association, who had, out of pity, given him one of their country branch agencies.

He never wrote to England, and it came on him as a considerable surprise when his brother, wrote announcing that the death of his own two sons and of his brother George had made Cyril his heir-at-law, and demanding for what consideration he would join in cutting off the entail, thus leaving the baronet free to bequeath all the property to his only surviving child—a daughter.

Cyril asked about double what he meant to accept; a long correspondence ensued, and while it was at its height Mr. Maitland, as one of the young man's oldest friends, wrote to Sir Robert urging the cruel injustice cutting off the entail would be to James, and begging for his nephew's sake the baronet would change his mind, so that when no answer came, the merchant who had taken a great interest in the matter, insisted on franking Jim's expenses to England that he might plead his cause in person with his uncle.

Normanurst was a lovely picture of an English home even in winter, when the trees were bare and the beauties of the gardens were veiled in snow.

On the very day when Jim waited so impatiently at the Cape Town Hotel, Sir Robert and Lady Norman sat in earnest consultation in the library.

They were not the selfish, avaricious people Mr. Maitland had expected from their silence.

A long and serious illness had prevented Sir Robert attending to business matters for weeks, and this was the first time he had been well enough to talk on a subject which always agitated him.

He was a fine-looking man of fifty-five, his wife a dozen years younger, looked worthy of him. Alice Barry had only known the Normans after the black sheep's departure; she had never seen him in her life, and could hardly be expected to prefer his interests to those of her only child.

"It is hard on your nephew," she admitted, "but think of this lovely place in the power of a man like your brother is described to be; Vera loves every acre of the estate, every brick of the

old house. I can't help feeling, now her brothers are taken, she has the first claim."

The baronet looked troubled.

"My lawyer seems to think I shall find a difficulty, and that, being of age, this James may be able to prevent the agreement from taking place. According to the Africander friend—what was the name? Maitland—according to Mr. Maitland, whatever sum I pay as compensation, will go to my precious brother and his second family, James won't see a shilling of it; he also declares Cyril has so ruined his constitution his life is not worth a five years' purchase."

Lady Norman looked into the fire.

"If only the young man were a boy, if this had happened ten years ago, you might have brought him over and educated him up to his position, but now, Robert, I can't bear to think of it. It is hard enough to know our own boys are gone, but to see this barbarian at Normanhurst is too much."

Sir Robert rested his hand caressingly on his wife's shoulder.

"It is you I think of most, Alice; I should never live to see it."

The tears came into her eyes.

"Don't, Bob! Without you I should never care for this place, and if you make no treaty with your brother, you will be able after all to leave Vera an ample fortune; it is horrid talking of what can only affect us after your death; let us drop the subject."

"We can't do that," said the baronet, very gravely. "If I thought it was a question of Cyril's reigning here, I would spend my last shilling in trying to cut off the entail; but I confess it does seem hard on the lad. In any case Vera will be amply provided for. Your fortune is settled on her, and I shall leave her all my savings, and Mowbray is so rich that he needs no portion with his wife."

Lady Norman hesitated.

"You think that will really come to pass, Bob? You know there is no real engagement."

"It was his father's wish, and is ours. For the last seven years he has always seemed to have regarded Vera as his own property; and eighteen months at St. Helena can't have changed his feelings. There are no girls out there, I believe."

"I was thinking of Vera. When I told her Mowbray was coming home—that he had been granted six months' leave on private affairs, she did not seem in the least pleased."

"What did she say?"

"That, for her part, she wondered he cared about pleasing, when his father was just dead! That she hated saying 'Good-bye;' and, having just taken his departure for three years, he might as well have stayed away till they were up."

Sir Robert winced.

"I don't mean they are passionately attached to each other; I fancy cousins seldom are. But I am sure their regard is warm and sincere. I shall be perfectly satisfied to see Vera your nephew's wife."

A smile flitted over Alice Norman's face.

"When we were married, Bob, would you have been satisfied if I had had a warm and sincere regard for you?"

"No; but I don't think Vera has as much heart as her mother."

"She has, only she is longer in finding it."

"I suppose you have never spoken to her about this plan, and—the future?"

"Never once. I doubt if she has ever heard of your brother, Cyril; she was so broken down by the boys' death, I am sure she would never think what difference it could make in her own prospects."

"But, you said yourself, she loves Normanhurst. You wish her to be mistress here?"

"She loves it dearly. Yes, for many things, I should like to think my child would be mistress here; but—"

"Go on, dear; I want to get at your real feelings."

"Why, I don't like the thought that the dear old place may become just an appendage to Barry Court. Mowbray is as devoted to his birthplace,

as Vera is to hers. He isn't suited to the rôle of Prince Consort."

"Hush! here she comes."

The possible heiress of Normanhurst was a girl of twenty, as great a contrast to her unknown cousin, Honor, as could be found.

Vera Norman was tall and stately, reminding one somewhat of Tennyson's Princess, "Divinely tall and most divinely fair." She had big, honest grey eyes, with long dark lashes, a profusion of bright yellow hair, which had only just missed being the true golden tint, and a healthy English complexion of clear red and white. Until her brothers' death she had never known a trouble, from her birth almost she had hardly known a day's illness; she was a bright, high-spirited girl, with ordinary abilities and plenty of common sense, but her face had not the subtle charm, her voice had not the sympathetic ring of poor Honor's.

"Mother dear," she began in a tone of reproach, as she took possession of a low chair near the fire, "are you never coming? Don't you know you promised to come into the conservatory directly after breakfast, and choose what flowers I should send to the Grays?"

Lady Norman blushed as though detected in a crime.

"I am afraid I forgot all about it, Vera. Your father wanted me, but I will come now."

"It is too late now, Gresham has gone to his dinner. Mother dear, is there anything the matter? You have been here three mortal hours, and you look as if you had been crying."

Sir Robert interposed.

"Your eyes are too sharp, child. Sit down again, and tell us what you have been doing all the morning. You shall have the flowers after lunch."

"Doing?" Vera sighed. "I've just been waiting about, doing nothing. The Hall is awfully dull now you keep mother with you, and I have not a creature to speak to."

"You forget your father has been ill?" said Lady Norman, gently; "and we could not bear to have strangers here just yet."

"I know I'm a hateful girl, but mother, it is so dull, everything reminds me of the boys, if I go for a ride, I have to take it alone, and think of the time when George was always ready to gallop over the common with me; if I stay at home there is nothing to do, no one to talk to. Fact the people couldn't shun us more if we were criminals."

"People are terribly afraid of scarlet fever," said Sir Robert. "I dare say for weeks and weeks they did not believe us free from infection, then came my illness, and now I expect it is so long since any of our neighbours were here, that they shrink from their first visit."

"But you won't be alone much longer," said her mother cheerfully; "I heard from Mowbray last night, he sails from Cape Town in the *Spaniard*, and will be here in less than three weeks."

Vera's face showed not the least pleasure.

"What is he doing at Cape Town? I thought he was at St. Helena."

"The steamers call at St. Helena so seldom one sometimes saves time by going on to Cape Town—it is only a week's journey—and taking the mail there."

"He needn't have been in such a hurry," said Vera composedly. "I don't suppose there was anyone counting the days till he came."

"Vera," cried her father, roused to annoyance, "what do you mean?"

Miss Norman actually smiled.

"Well, you know papa, Mowbray always was a model young man. I believe he has longed to improve Barry Court and put all the servants there to rights for years, only Uncle Barry never would let him make any change; and now I can guess how he is yearning to begin his wholesome reforms, only poor Uncle loved the place just as it was, and—I pity the people who exchange his rule for Mowbray's, and so—I am sorry he was in such a hurry."

Lord Barry, Lady Norman's only brother, had been a despot. He would have no advice but his own. A bigotted Conservative, he allowed no change to be made in the manage-

ment of his estate. His tenants had all grown old under his rule, and every thing at the Court was about fifty years behind hand. There was no doubt that the new Lord Barry at thirty, and full of energy and zeal, would make sweeping reforms, and most of them were needed; but Lady Norman understood her child's sympathy for the old servants and ancient customs; she could smile at Vera's impetuosity; but her husband looked seriously angry.

"You are unjust to your cousin, Vera; I regard Mowbray as a most admirable young man. His father insisted on his remaining in the army, or he would have willingly devoted himself to him the three last years."

"Uncle Barry did not want to abdicate before his death," said Vera, "and he hated being kept in order; but, papa, I don't see how Mowbray's being in Yorkshire instead of St. Helena, is to affect my dulness."

"He is coming here, dear," said her mother; "he will spend the first month of his leave with us."

"What a respite for Barry Court, and what a sacrifice for him to make."

"It is no sacrifice, Vera," said Sir Robert gravely, "it is only affection for you to pretend not to understand Lord Barry's object."

"It's very difficult to think of him as Lord Barry. I don't in the least understand his object, unless he thinks he can fill my brothers' place, and even Mowbray is not conceited enough for that."

"He cannot fill the boys' place with you," said Sir Robert, "but you must surely know there is a nearer nearer place he aspires to fill. For the last seven years Mowbray has made you his special care, Vera, and but for my express wish he would have spoken to you before he left England."

"Spoken to me—about what?" demanded Miss Norman, gravely.

"Vera," said her mother gently, "don't annoy your father by your wilfulness; you must know perfectly well that Mowbray loves you, and wants to make you his wife."

The big grey eyes opened wide with amazement.

"There must be some extraordinary mistake. Mowbray doesn't care for me like that. Why, he never said a word of affection to me in his life. As to making me his 'special care,' I know he used to lecture me till I hated the very sight of him, and I would not marry him to save my life."

"You talk like a spoilt child," said Sir Robert angrily, and he flung out of the room, leaving mother and daughter alone.

Every vestige of carelessness died out of Vera's face, it softened strangely as she got up, and put one arm round her mother's neck.

"Mummy, deary," she said, coaxing, "the pater doesn't mean it. Oh, do say that he doesn't; the bare idea is too awful."

"My dear child, you never seemed to dislike Mowbray."

"Oh, we get on well enough as friends. I rather like shocking him and making him angry; but to spend my life with him—it's too awful. What does the pater mean?"

Lady Norman hesitated.

"You know your uncle was very fond of you," she began, gently; "it was poor Barry's wish first made us think of it."

"Well, go on."

"While your brothers lived," said her mother, quietly, "your fortune was a small one. My portion had been settled on my 'second son,' and your father intended to leave George the larger share of his savings."

Vera nodded.

"I know. The pater used to tell me over and over again, when I was a child, I must be economical, for he couldn't give me much money—but what has that to do with Mowbray?"

"You were my brother's godchild, and I do believe the dearest object to him in the world. He and Mowbray never 'got on,' and though the Barry estate must go with the title, the personal property, which is far more valuable, was totally at his disposal. Seven years ago when

your uncle Barry made his will he wanted to settle it on you."

"That would have been abominable," said the girl, hotly. "Why should I rob Mowbray?"

"So we thought, and Mowbray himself declared he could not keep up the Court if so large a fortune were alienated. Your father went up to Yorkshire, and between the three a kind of compact was arrived at that Mowbray should have the whole property on condition that he married you before you were twenty-one."

"And if he changed his mind?"

"A hundred thousand pounds would be paid you from the Barry property."

"Pleasant for Mowbray—and if I declined the honour?"

"Mowbray would retain the money unless—he married anyone else while you were still single."

"Poor Mowbray," said Vera, with a strange little laugh. "He will keep his money, but I'm afraid he'll never be able to marry, for I shall keep single all my days."

"Vera, for our sakes won't you try and be kind to Mowbray."

"I will be extremely kind to him for I shall refuse to marry him, and as we neither of us have a spark of love for each other, that is the truest kindness."

"It will break your father's heart, all his hopes are set on the match!"

"Oh no it won't," there was a strange pained look on her face. "Papa cares more for Lord Barry than for me. He will soon be thankful his dear nephew is saved from such a wife."

"Vera, you are talking cruelly."

"Am I? But, mother dear, don't you know everyone round us felt that he would have given my life gladly in that dreadful fever time if he could only have kept George? Doesn't he grudge me your love and companionship, and want to keep you all to himself. No, he regards me as a mistake, just because I am not a son."

"You wrong him, Vera," said Lady Norman, "you do indeed."

"I suppose when there's a title in question men feel it more," said Vera, gravely. "Will the baronetcy die out, mother, now uncle George is dead? Papa hasn't a single relation on his own side."

"He has over a dozen," said Lady Norman, sadly. "My dear, I don't know if your father would approve of my telling you; but he has a brother settled in South Africa with a wife and twelve children."

"Twelve more cousins. I wonder if they are all such prigs as Mowbray?"

"You will never see them," said her mother, hastily, "your Uncle Cyril is no credit to the family, and his children would be no fit companions for you."

"That's hard on them to judge them by their father," said Vera. "Are there any girls?"

"Six or seven."

"Oh, mother, do send for one of them to stay with us. I would show her everything, and try to polish her up enough to please papa. Why, it would be as good as having a sister of my own!"

"Vera, you must never talk like this. Your uncle Cyril is a bad man, and his children are probably little better than barbarians."

"Do you mean he married a native? Why then my cousins would be coloured!"

"He had two wives. I know nothing about them. I don't wish to."

"Two at once?" asked Miss Norman, with an embarrassed air. "How very odd!"

"Vera, you know perfectly well I meant nothing of the kind. Never let me hear you speak of your Uncle Cyril and his family again. It will make your father furious."

"Oh, dear, I should have liked a cousin to be with me so much."

"You will have Mowbray in less than three weeks," said Lady Norman, positively refusing to see the shrug of Vera's graceful shoulders.

CHAPTER III.

HONOR BRADLEY'S difficulties began when the first bell for dinner sounded, and she had to decide what to put on, very conscious that her faded cotton gown would not be equal to the occasion.

Poor Honor!

Kind Mrs. Maitland would gladly have placed her whole wardrobe at her disposal, since she could hardly buy her clothes in a night and three hours of early morning, which was the length of time the girl was her guest; but the garments of a matron of fifty odd are hardly adapted to the figure of a girl in the early twenties.

A lace bonnet and cloak for the journey, a shady Madeira hat for wear on sunny days, Honor had readily accepted; but when it came to dresses it was another matter. A loose white muslin wrapper for the tropics. A black silk skirt, and a couple of blouses, were all of Mrs. Maitland's attire that seemed convertible to her use.

She put on the skirt now. It was so large in the waist that it had to be pinned over, and was so long as to form a slight train.

Honor decided before to-morrow she would alter it, for to-night it must do; and with a blouse of cherry-coloured pongee silk (Mrs. Maitland loved bright tints) would, perhaps, pass muster.

She gave one look in the tiny glass as the second bell sounded, and wondered if Jim would feel very much ashamed of her, poor child. It was three years turned since she had cared what she wore or how she looked.

Jim was waiting outside the cabin-door, and they went into the saloon together to find seats allotted to them at the Captain's table, and that, except a kind motherly-looking woman with grey hair, Honor was the only lady at that particular table who had not succumbed to the motion of the vessel.

"You'll make a first-rate sailor, Miss Bradley," said Captain Fraser. "You look as if you enjoyed the pitching rather than not."

"I think I do," said Honor, frankly. "I never was on a ship before, and it seems delightful."

The old lady smiled, and remarked she had crossed nine times. This was her fifth journey home.

"But I shan't stay there," she said, cheerfully, "there's not enough sunshine to keep me, and I shouldn't be going now but that my youngest girl has chosen to engage herself to an Englishman, and I feel I must see her wedding."

Mrs. Malcom and the Captain were old acquaintances, and plunged into a conversation on weddings in general, and African weddings in particular.

A tall military-looking man in the corner next Honor, gave it as his opinion that weddings were a great nuisance—an awful bore to the lookers on.

"I don't know," and the girl's cheeks were scarlet. "I haven't been to any weddings."

"Not been to any weddings, my dear!" and Mrs. Malcom looked scandalised. "Do you mean it?"

Jim, in pity for his sister, took the answer on himself.

"We have always lived in a very quiet, up-country town; we have seen a few marriages, but not what is meant by a grand wedding."

Mrs. Malcom seemed mollified.

"Well, you'll see plenty of them in England. It's all grandeur there, I believe; so that a man's a good match that's all the girls think about."

The gentleman next Honor looked glum, as if he did not like the turn the talk had taken. The Captain began to rally Mrs. Malcom on her prejudices, and Jim asked the stranger if he had been making a long stay in the colony, it was impossible to fancy he was a resident there.

"One day; I have been exceptionally fortunate. The steamer from St. Helena was just in in time for me to secure my passage in the *Spaniard*, of course it was impossible to see much of Cape Town, but I strolled through the chief streets."

After dinner, Mrs. Malcom enticed Honor to take a stroll with her on deck, praised her for not minding the motion of the vessel, and finally lamented that "that stuck-up Englishman" should be at their table.

"He did not seem stuck-up to me," said the girl. "I thought he was only grave and sad."

"I know all about him," said Mrs. Malcom, "my son came out with him last year; he is an officer, and was stationed at St. Helena. Captain Barry his name is; now his father's dead, and

he's going home to take possession of an enormous property in Yorkshire."

Honor thought he did not look very elated at the prospect, and then Mrs. Malcom suddenly left her to speak to somebody else. Jim came up to her with Captain Barry. He seemed to have struck up quite an acquaintance with the young officer, and the three talked pleasantly enough on trifling subjects till it was time for Honor to retire.

In three days time the nine ladies who belonged to the first-class saloon had all conquered their sea sickness, and came to meals, and some of them were very irate to find Honor installed at the captain's table, and forthwith began to pick her to pieces so spitefully that it was all kind Mrs. Malcom could do to keep their unkind words from coming to the girl's own ears.

"Lady! she's no lady," said Mrs. Greene, the wife of a Cape Town wine merchant; "why she's only got one decent dress to her back; that cotton thing she wears in the morning no Kaffir servant would say 'thank you' for."

"She has lived in a very dull, up-country town," put in Honor's defender; "very likely she had no idea people wanted much dress on board ship."

"Then her brother should have told her," put in Mrs. Greene sharply; "he's well dressed enough himself. There's some mystery about that girl, and mark my words, whenever there's a mystery there's a shame."

"Oh, hush," cried Mrs. Malcom, "I'm sure Miss Bradley's a nice girl, only a little shy and unused to strangers."

"What's she going to England for?" demanded another matron. "I should say her mother had better have spent the passage money on buying her a few clothes."

"They're going to look after some property," said Mrs. Malcom, bridling up. "Mr. Bradley told me so himself; there's an estate in England they think perhaps he's next heir to, and so he's going over to see about it."

"Well, if he proves his claim, I hope he'll buy his sister a new dress," said Mrs. Greene, spitefully.

At that moment Honor passed; she was walking with Mowbray Barry, and he knew from the vivid blush that dyed her face she had heard the cruel shaft, and knew that it was meant for herself; she said not a word however, only placing a deck chair for her well out of the way of the gossips, and as he found another for himself, remarked drily,—

"I think a long voyage shows up a person's character thoroughly; after three weeks of such close quarters we know a good deal of our fellow-passengers."

"Mrs. Malcom is very kind," said Honor, warmly, "she has asked us to go and stay with her in London."

"And are you going?"

"I hardly know. We are going to England on business, you know, and Jim has only three months' leave from his situation at Sandstone."

"What is he?" asked Mowbray. "He doesn't look like a clerk."

"Oh, no; he is traveller for a feather merchant; he likes the work."

"And I suppose you live with him, and keep his house?"

"Oh, no." Her face grew grave and sad. "I have been away a long time, and Jim hasn't a house to keep. Between his journeys, when he isn't travelling, he lives at my father's."

"And are you, too, only going to spend three months' at home?"

"I hope to stay in England always. If I can help it I will never set foot in Africa again!"

Mowbray was almost startled at her vehemence.

"How you hate it! And yet, forgive me, I had fancied you Colonial born!"

"I am. I had never been out of the colony before."

"And you longed for change?"

"My own mother was English. I can only just remember her; but she always spoke of England as though it was dearer to her than anywhere else."

Mowbray sighed.

"I suppose some people feel like that."

"Don't you?"

"I am fond of England, but abroad one belongs only to oneself. In England one has relations to study, family opinions to consider; a man can't stand alone and please himself."

Honor looked bewildered.

"I don't think people please themselves in Africa," she said, slowly.

Mowbray Barry walked off. A strangely reserved man, he was surprised at himself for having said so much. But there was a weight at his heart which seemed to grow heavier as the voyage went on.

His cousin Vera would be twenty-one that summer; he was going home to marry her, and there was no love for her in his heart; he shrank from the thought of spending his life with her.

Long ago, when his father first broached the subject, he had not troubled very much about it. Vera was a nice little girl then, just in her teens, and he had fancied the task of training her in his own ways would be a very pleasant one; unfortunately, as the years rolled on, the cousins grew more and more unsuited.

Mowbray's ideal woman was someone who would love him devotedly, and look up to him with something like reverence. Vera, with her strong will, her proud haughty manner, her way of putting herself on a perfect equality with him in spite of his superior sex, was a nightmare to him.

He went abroad, thankful for the separation, hoping against hope his father would either alter his will or live long enough to see its conditions made impossible by Vera showing a preference for someone else.

He had been much attached to her brothers, and yet their deaths seemed to him almost a relief, seeing now Vera was to be mistress of Normanhurst—he knew nothing of the entail—and her father's sole heiress, the compact which had been made, solely to benefit her, might be set aside.

Alas! his own father died within three months of Sir Robert's sons, the will had never been altered, and Mowbray's uncle seemed more set than ever on having him for a son-in-law.

A hundred thousand pounds was a heavy price to pay for his freedom, and Mowbray knew that, with the improvements required on the estate after his father's neglect, he could not give up so large a sum without injuring the property.

No, if he refused Vera and paid the fine, he must let Barry Court for a term of years and go back to his exile at St. Helena, with all his projects and improvements unfinished, nay, not even commenced.

Mowbray's one dream was that Vera might see someone she preferred to himself; but the time was so short, and her father's state of health, combined with the family bereavements, made it unlikely she would go much into society at present.

He was almost hopeless, he saw no way out of the difficulty; he must either make his cousin Lady Barry, or pay her a hundred thousand pounds.

He had looked on the voyage as a necessary infliction, but there were so few passengers he found not a creature who knew his rather romantic history, and was, therefore, free from the ridicule and gossip his sensitive nature had dreaded. He began to take an interest solely in what went on around him, and at first from the generous desire of a strong nature to protect anything weaker than itself, he made it his mission on board the *Spaniard* to be Miss Bradley's champion, and guard her against the taunts and harsh criticisms of the other ladies.

It was the easier to do this because he honestly liked her brother; he had taken a fancy to the simple manly young fellow, and seeing that every stab to Honor was a keener one to Jim, Captain Barry (no one on board was aware he had come into the title) took on himself to silence them. He hardly knew himself how he managed it. Of the nine ladies, Mrs. Malcom was already on Honor's side, and two sisters, genial old maids, were ready to follow her lead. The other six were a great deal of trouble to Mowbray, but he had a certain charm of manner no one could withstand if he chose to exercise it, and a certain amount of diplomacy he knew well

how to use. He persuaded each of the six aggrieved ladies that theirs was the paramount influence, that if they were friendly to Miss Bradley the other five would speedily follow suit. He suggested to them as colonials they ought not to waver against a girl who was avowedly colonial born—and this was his trump card—he hinted that if the Bradleys really did become the owners of an English estate, it would be a pity to have quarrelled with them.

One by one he gained the ladies over to at least outward civility, but he could not establish any real intimacy between them and Honor.

"You see, Captain Barry," complained Mrs. Greene, "Miss Bradley's so very close; her brother's quite different, he talks of what he's been doing, last winter or last Christmas, as friendly as can be, but she never opens her lips of her own accord, and if you ask her a civil question it's five to one she won't answer you. If Honor Bradley had been to sleep the day after she was seventeen and only woke up again on board the *Spaniard*, she couldn't have less to say. Why, I asked her how many little sisters she had, yesterday, and she actually didn't know."

Lord Barry pacified Mrs. Greene, but she had only put his own feeling about Honor into words, the girl would talk freely enough of her childhood at Sandstone, and of the two years she had spent at a finishing school at Cape Town, confessing without a blush, she owed them to the generosity of her god-mother, Mrs. Maitland, but from the time her education was finished all seemed a blank.

Lord Barry began to wonder if she could have had some terrible illness which had left her memory for recent things a blank; her short hair, her delicate appearance, and her brother's evident anxiety about her favoured this view; but against it was her intense hatred of the colony, her yearning desire to spend the rest of her life in England, and the grave, almost sorrowful, reveries into which she fell whenever she was left alone.

No, Honor was as much a mystery to him as to Mrs. Greene, and he spent a great deal of his time in wondering what the secret was hidden in the depths of those lovely eyes.

Jem, who would talk cordially on any other subject, never willingly mentioned his sister. It came out once, almost accidentally, that they had been parted three years, and then the poor fellow looked as if he had betrayed something he would give worlds to recall.

Lord Barry never seemed to notice the slip, but in his own mind he treasured the fact. It was four years since Honor left school, so in the first twelve months after her return home must have happened whatever had so strangely marked her life.

Of course there were amusements got up to brighten the voyage. The sailors gave a wonderful nigger entertainment with limelight effects, and the passengers managed some tableaux and a concert of very fair merit. Mowbray was asked to sing and consented at once. Jim Bradley was in great demand, but Lord Barry noticed how he tried to spare his sister a similar invitation.

"Honor is not very strong. I am sure she had better not sing."

"Well, at any rate we'll ask her," said Mrs. Greene, decidedly; "she looks musical," and before Jim could interfere the request was carried to the hurricane deck where Honor sat reading.

Lord Barry noticed she was very pale, but her consent was prompt.

"I will sing with pleasure if anyone will play my accompaniments, it is so long since I touched a piano I am afraid to undertake them."

"You are sure," said Jim, in a low voice, "you are not afraid it will be too much for you?"

"Quite sure!" she answered, in the same tone, the aside being only heard by Lord Barry, who at once offered his services as accompanist.

They had one practice together, and he was almost startled at the purity and beauty of her voice. She sang like one whose talent has received long and careful training, and yet so naturally that every word went straight to the listener's heart.

"You will be the sensation of the concert," Mowbray told her. "Miss Bradley, I never heard a voice like yours off the stage."

"Please don't," and her face was pale as death. "I used to be very fond of music, but these last years I have hated the very sound of it."

Mrs. Malcom was far too kind-hearted not to try to assist Honor's toilet for the concert. The silk skirt which had been worn night after night could never serve for this festivity. She hesitated, and finally offered the loan of a fine embroidered Indian muslin, bought a bargain from one of the Indians who haunt the colony, and intended to form part of her daughter's trousseau. Miss Bradley, she suggested could "run it up" in no time, and there being no fit in the present style of bodice, it would be just as good for Bertha afterwards. Other things there were Mrs. Malcom insisted on her favourite's borrowing, so that when the eventful night came and Lord Barry led her on to the temporary stage hastily constructed by the ship's carpenter, he was almost amazed at her dazzling appearance.

She wore a white dress, long and flowing, made with a baby bodice, above which her snowy neck rose in faultless perfection, while the rounded arms escaping from the short sleeves gleamed like polished marble. The short hair clustered in silky curls on the graceful head. A girdle of silver filigree ivory, confined the dress at the waist. It was the only touch, which broke the snowy whiteness of the whole, and, standing by her side, Mowbray's heart gave a great bump as he realized he would have paid the hundred thousand pounds needful to secure his freedom gladly, thankfully, if he had known that freedom might be spent with Honor.

She sang twice, English ballads, both of them simple lays which seemed to wake an echo in the hearers' hearts. First the "Bailiff's Daughter of Islington," and then the "Banks of Allan Water." As he listened to the last a strange panic smote Lord Barry. Could it be that Honor was singing in character? Had a false lover lured her from her home and broken her heart? But no, it could not be. Every day seemed to bring back her spirits, and make her sweet face brighter. He would not believe the secret in her past had ought to do with love. He was a quick observer, and he would have staked a good deal that Honor Bradley's loving, was yet to come.

The last line died away—"there a corpse lay she." Barry rose from the piano, and led Honor down the steps. For a moment they were alone, and he saw the tears in her eyes.

"What is it?" he asked. "Has that song any painful associations for you?"

"It is my favourite song. Only I have often thought the miller's daughter did not really need our pity. Don't you see, her sorrow did not last long. Death came and took her."

Lord Barry's hand tightened on Honor's. He spoke very, very gravely.

"You must not speak like that—it sounds as though you had wished for death."

"Wished for it!" the words were almost like a moan. "I've longed for it over and over again. There have been days when I could not have trusted myself near a river lest I should have forgotten there is another life than this. Oh!" coming back to the present with a strange scared face, "what have I said?"

"Nothing that will not be perfectly safe with me," said Barry, passionately. "Oh I can't you trust me! Won't you let me be your friend?"

He used the word "friend," but his heart said something far dearer. He had forgotten his father's will—forgotten his cousin in England, and the tie which bound him to her.

He could think now only of the beautiful creature at his side—the girl, whose strange sad history he could not even guess, and whom he knew now he loved with every fibre of his heart.

The stars of the southern sky looked down upon them—on the girl in her white dress, on the man with his aching heart—his desperate fight between love and honour. A hundred wild words trembled on Lord Barry's lips. He kept them back by a gigantic effort, raising the little hand

he kissed it passionately; then with a tumult raging at his heart he went back to the concert.

CHAPTER IV.

The *Spaniard* reached Madeira at ten o'clock on a bright February morning, to the great delight of those who wished to explore the beautiful island, especially as all sorts of Job's comforters had been declaring they were sure to get in when it was too dark to see anything, even if it wasn't in the middle of the night.

Ten o'clock, with the announcement from Captain Fraser he should sail again at four, suited everyone, and parties were soon arranged to view as much as could be seen of Funchal in the time.

It was some days since the concert. Lord Barry was no nearer solving the mystery about Honor Bradley, and he rather fancied since her strange confession she had avoided being left *tête-à-tête* with him; but he and her brother were on the best of terms; and he felt sure Jim would agree to his joining them in their exploring.

Lord Barry's conscience must have been fast asleep by this time, for he had wilfully put his cousin Vera and the family compact out of his head, and given himself up to all the rapture of his love for Honor; and when love comes to a man for the first time at thirty-two he is apt to take the disease badly.

Quite half-a-dozen persons had begged "Captain Barry" to join them; but he had made some specious excuse.

He wanted to know the Bradleys' plans before making his own. At last he discovered Honor sitting near the side of the ship watching the boats continually coming to her from the shore.

Jim was at her elbow, and as Mowbray approached, he caught the words—

"Do come Honor! It is such a lovely place, and you may not have another chance of seeing it!"

"You go by yourself, Jim, or join some party." "Oh! I shall see it when I go out again; but you won't have the chance Honor, dear, do come. I want to have you with me, it's such ages since you and I did any sight-seeing together."

She put one hand timidly on his arm.

"Do you think it's safe, Jim?"

"Safe, dear, of course it is. Honor, do cast off this awful terror. From the moment we left Cape Town your fears were groundless."

"But you know I've only a big hat, and Mrs. Maitland's bonnet!"

"Those hats are called Madeira, so they must be the fashion here. I'll give you ten minutes to get ready, Honor."

Not till Jim was alone did Lord Barry join him.

"I hope you and Miss Bradley will let me go on shore with you," he said, cheerily. "I was here once for some weeks, so I may be of use as guide."

"It will be awfully good of you," said Jim, warmly. "Honor has just gone to get ready."

There was a little old gentleman, who sat next Jim at table, a Mr. Watson, who, having made a pile in Cape wool, was going home to spend it. He had taken a great fancy to the young Bradleys, and begged to make a fourth, when having reached land, Lord Barry was hiring one of the funny little vehicles, which seem peculiar to the island. As in his present frame of mind the officer much preferred four to three, the proposal was accepted, and the quartette started merrily up the hills to the church, which everyone thinks it their duty to visit.

Then, as Mowbray had expected, they broke up into two pairs, and he found himself at Honor's side, thinking the big, coarse hat just suited her, and made her look younger than ever.

They had left the church, and stood on the top of the hill looking down on to the town.

"It's a lovely place," said Lord Barry, "I could understand anyone being content to stay here for ever."

"So could I; and it feels like summer. It seems impossible to think that in four or five

days we shall be in the middle of an English winter."

"Where are you going to stay in England?" asked Mowbray, wishing with all his heart Mrs. Grundy would allow him to offer them the use of his big London house.

"Oh, we shall take rooms; someone told Jim English hotels were dreadfully dear. We shall take rooms in some quiet place till Jim has seen the lawyers."

"An old servant of my mother's lives in London and lets lodgings," said Lord Barry. "I wonder if you would let me give you her address? You know," he tried to speak lightly, "London's a big place and you might fall into the hands of robbers."

She smiled.

"I'm afraid Jim does look very young, but he's five-and-twenty. Still, if you would give us the address it would be pleasant to feel we had been recommended there."

"Mrs. Johnson lives in Mecklenburg-street, No. 99," said Mowbray; "it's a convenient part of London, and within a walk of the Temple where lawyers congregate, but, of course, it's not fashionable."

"Jim and I are not fashionable people; I am sure we shall like Mecklenburg-street very much if Mrs. Johnson can make room for us."

"I hope you will win your cause," said Mowbray, gravely; "do you know I always feel sorry for people who are going to law, it seems such a risk."

"But we are not going to law; in the sense you mean," explained Honor, compelled to confide in the grave, handsome soldier. "We are not going to bring an action against anyone."

"I understood your brother was going to England to claim some property. I confess it puzzled me how he could possibly expect the matter to be settled in less than three months."

"I should like to tell you about it, Captain Barry," said Honor. "You are English, and so you would understand poor Jim's position far better than our African friends can do, kind as they are."

"I'm afraid I'm no hand at law, but I shall be proud to hear about your brother's claims."

"Someone on board the *Spaniard* told us you had lost your father," said Honor, sadly, "and I felt sorry for you, but, Captain Barry, losing a good father can't be so painful as having a bad one; our father, Jim's and mine, is—bad."

Mowbray's hand closed over her fingers.

"You poor child," he said gently; "I don't wonder you cling to Jim, he must stand in your father's place."

"I think he must have been bad always," went on Honor,—"father, I mean—for I know that his family paid him to leave England; he married my mother on the voyage out, I can only just remember her, but while she lived she kept him straight; his second wife was an Africaner; she has twelve children of her own and she hates Jim and me."

Lord Barry's face expressed his interest; he did not interrupt her by a single question.

"Some of father's relations are dead, a great many, I think, and as things are, when his brother dies he will come into the property; but this brother thinks he would disgrace it, and has offered him money to cut off the entail. My stepmother thinks the money would provide for her children, she does not mind robbing Jim. If my father takes this money Jim will never have a shilling of it, and he is going home to beg his uncle not to cut off the entail."

"Mr. Maitland says he does not understand English law, but he thinks Jim being of age, has a voice in the matter, and that without his consent the bargain can't be made. So you see Jim is going home, not to claim a fortune but to beg for justice."

"As regards law," said Lord Barry, "I fancy it depends a great deal on the wording of the entail; but if your uncle has any justice, when he sees your brother he must give way. No one could look at Jim without seeing he is true and loyal. I should prophesy, Miss Honor, neither of you will go back to Africa, but your uncle would adopt you both."

And even as he spoke he tried to remember

any county family of the name of Bradley. He who knew all the notables of English society must surely have met their uncle; yet try as he would, he could not recall any other Bradleys than Honor and her brother.

"Shall you be in London?" asked the girl a little wistfully; "is your home near?"

"My home is in Yorkshire, but I shall be staying near London for the present. My uncle lives forty miles out, and I have promised to spend a month with him, I hope you will let me come and see you."

"We shan't be in London long." As soon as Jim has finished his business with Mr. Graham, we shall know if his journey has been in vain. If he succeeds, my uncle may want to see him."

"He is sure to, and you also."

She shook her head.

"Oh, I shall have no time for visits. I must try to find a situation as soon as possible."

"A situation!"

"Yes," she said, frankly. "I have been well educated for the colony, and I could teach young children; besides, I must find some work to fill up my life, or I should be so terribly desolate when Jim leaves me."

"Honor!" he had come quite close to her and their eyes met. "Honor, will you trust your life to me and let me try to gild it up with sunshine. My darling, I have no right to speak to you so soon. I meant to go to England first and break some fetters which enchain me; but, Honor, I love you with all my heart and soul. I would give up riches, inheritance, just to call you mine!"

"I never dreamed of this. Oh, Captain Barry, I never thought that you—"

"That I loved you," he said, finishing the sentence. "Honor, I have loved you almost ever since we met, though I never knew any own secret till the night of the concert, and I heard you sing. I have never loved any woman but yourself. I never shall."

"You said you were not free," she breathed.

"By my father's will and an old family compact, I am bound to marry my cousin, or else forfeit a large part of my fortune. I never cared for Vera nor she for me; but, for the sake of the property, I might have carried out the project. Since I have known you, Honor, I have felt I could not, loving you with every fibre of my heart, what chance should I have of happiness with another woman. Oh, Honor, oh, my little love, when once I have broken through these light bonds, say I may come back to you."

"I cannot say it," breathed the girl. "Oh, Captain Barry, I wish we had never met. I wish you had never learned to care for me. I have wrecked your life, yet Heaven knows I did not do it willingly. I never guessed you cared for me."

"I shall care till my life's end. Honor, can't you give me hope. Indeed, indeed, I can come to you without breaking a single vow. I never spoke a word of love to my cousin in my life. I even doubt if she has yet learned the family compact."

"It is not that."

"You never seemed to dislike me," he pleaded, "and I would wait so patiently, so faithfully until I had won your love."

"You don't understand," said the girl, hoarsely, "it is not that I can't love you. Heaven help me, I love you now; but—I am not free!"

He looked at her with fever-bright eyes as though he would read her very soul.

"Not engaged?" he faltered.

"No—married."

Mr. Wilson and Jim rejoined them at that moment, they all repaired to the English hotel for a meal between lunch and tea; Honor ate nothing, she looked like a ghost, and, in reply to her brother's questions, admitted that she was tired—very tired.

Somewhat a blight had fallen over the little party, and when they left the hotel, though it was but little after two o'clock, Jim suggested they might as well go on board.

Honor went straight to her cabin and did not appear at dinner. Lord Barry fancied some explanation must have taken place between her and

her brother, for Jim looked grave and troubled. Later that evening, when most of the passengers had gone below, he found young Bradley at his side.

"May I speak to you for a few minutes?"

They moved to the extreme end of the quarter deck, now quite deserted, and sat down, the elder man was the first to speak.

"She has told you?"

"She has told me nothing. She begged me to tell you her story, and I fancied, poor girl! she feared you were getting to care for her. I never thought of it, or I might have warned you."

"I don't fancy any warning would have altered things with me," admitted Mowbray. "Go on!"

It was a piteous story, it made Lord Barry's blood boil with indignation as he listened, it made Jim's heart ache in the telling; and yet it was a very simple story and one that might have happened to any defenceless girl.

"When Honor left school her beauty and her musical talents made her quite the belle of Sandstone, the biggest people asked her to their houses, and Mrs. Bradley, who was unpopular with everyone, was madly jealous of her stepdaughter."

"Jim was on one of his longest journeys and not expected back for weeks, when a dark, sinister-looking stranger appeared at Sandstone and speedily became intimate with the Bradleys. He was an inveterate gambler, and the ne'er-do-well father loved cards better than anything, so they were well matched. At first Mr. Bradley won, then he began to lose, and lost steadily till he owed Roger Warren five hundred pounds, and the scoundrel offered to give up his I O U's, on condition Honor became his wife."

"She never would have consented," cried Jim fervently, "but that those fiends, Warren and my stepmother, contrived to make her believe I was dead; they actually showed her the notice of my death in a Transvaal paper, and she, thinking her only friend was gone—the Maitlands were in England—grew desperate. Mrs. Bradley gave her her choice to marry Warren or be turned penniless into the street. They had taken her away from Sandstone to a place forty miles off, where no one knew her, well where she could not count a single friend."

"Heaven help her! I don't know now, I never shall know, whether they drugged her till she was too dazed to resist their will, or how they managed it; but when I came back to Sandstone the first news I received was that Honor had married Roger Warren and gone with him to Kimberley."

"Six months later he came back furious, she had left him. He was running a gambling hell and tried to use her as a decoy. She never got to me, he followed her and took her back. I sent one letter to her imploring her to trust to me, and I would protect her with my life's blood. Then came a long—long silence; then one day, after I had started for Sandstone, Honor reached my father's house—to be refused a shelter."

"Our friends, Mr. and Mrs. Maitland, Heaven bless them! took her in. Mr. Maitland, unknown to anyone, brought her down to Cape Town, to join me, while his wife spread a report she was still at their house dangerously ill."

"In England we believe she will be free from Warren, even if he succeeds in tracking her—the law would protect her. What she has suffered no one will ever know. Warren turned furious when he found he could not bend her to his will; blows, abuse, insult, semi-starvation—she bore all while the child lived, as soon as it was dead she attempted flight a second time, with what success you know."

"I think I would give years of my life to be revenged on Warren. If you could see Honor as she was three years ago, you would realise a little of what she has suffered."

"Is there no hope of a divorce?"

"No; the people who could testify to Warren's shameful conduct and gross ill-usage are mere wanderers, never long in one place; it would be impossible to collect them to give evidence. I believe myself he will never dare to show his face in England. I think it was some offence against the laws of his country made him leave it. If I can only secure peace and quiet for Honor I shall be content."

Not so Mowbray. Lord Barry, loving the beautiful ill-used girl with all his heart and soul, he wanted for her far more than peace. The wish of his heart was to give Honor her freedom, freedom to accept his love and become his cherished wife.

They were never alone again, only when the mail train had reached Waterloo, and the passengers stood in a group on the long platform, Mowbray found himself beside the brother and sister.

"Say good-bye," he pleaded to Honor, putting out his hand, "let me feel we part friends."

She put her hand in his and looked up at him with her beautiful sad eyes.

"Good-bye," she answered gently; "Heaven bless you."

When Jim had rescued his luggage and the Bradleys drove off in a cab to Mecklenburg-street, to see if Mrs. Johnstone's apartments were to be let, glancing at his sister he was horrified to find her face was white as marble. He touched her hand, it was as cold as ice, poor Honor had fainted away.

"She must care for him after all," thought Jim disconsolately; "and what a good fellow he seems. Oh dear, is there to be no end to all the misery and suffering Roger Warren has brought upon Honor?"

CHAPTER V.

If Lord Barry felt disinclined to meet his relations at Normanhurst, one of those relations was quite as averse to welcoming him. Vera Norman never referred to that private conversation with her mother on the subject of her uncle's will, but her mind was quite made up; no powers on earth should induce her to marry Mowbray. She would take all the onus of the refusal upon herself. The only thing she could not do for him was to marry first. Mowbray should keep his hundred thousand pounds, but if once free from his cousin, he felt a desire to choose another wife, only then, if his father's will proved really binding, the fine would have to be paid; for Vera had quite made up her mind never to have a husband.

"I can give it back to Mowbray," she decided "Oh dear, I dread his visit. If he is bound to marry me before the twenty-first of June, I suppose he will soon say something about it, but it would be ever so much pleasanter if I just wrote him a little note asking him not to worry as I never meant to marry at all. I suppose though that would not do, it's hardly the thing to refuse him before he actually proposes, so I must wait, but I know it will make me feel horribly awkward. I shan't be able to quarrel with Mowbray a bit comfortably till we have got it over."

Sir Robert drove to the station to meet his nephew, and decided the soldier must have cared for his father more than anyone imagined, to be so altered by his death. He thought he had never seen Mowbray look so grave and troubled as now that he was free to commence the dream of his life, the alterations and improvements on his estate.

"You look wretchedly ill," was his greeting; "didn't the climate suit you?"

"I didn't mind the climate."

"Well, there's no need for you to return; of course you'll send in your papers and settle down at home. I can't let my only child go out to St. Helena."

Mowbray had no wish to take her there or anywhere else, but he could hardly say so in the first moment of their meeting.

"It has been a trying time for you, Uncle Robert," he said kindly; "I hope my aunt bears up pretty well."

"Better than I expected; she won't give way before me. You see, Mowbray, ours was a love match, and so, I suppose, while we've got each other, we bear most things somehow. I'm thankful you've come, I am worried to death."

"I shall be glad to do anything I can to help you—what is it? I thought the new agent was such a success."

"So he is; but what's the use of it? What's

the use of anything if as soon as the breath's out of my body my disreputable brother can make ducks and drakes of every thing!"

"I never knew you had another brother."

"But I have, worse luck! He'd sell his soul for a decent price, and he'd join with me to-morrow in cutting off the entail; but he's got a grown-up son who's dead against it, and Gresham seems to think he may give us trouble. And as though that wasn't enough, your aunt's gone over to the other side, and says it seems cruel to rob the young man of his birthright."

A sharp suspicion came to Mowbray; was it possible, could the "young man" be Jim?

"Where does your brother live, Uncle Robert? I must say, if he's a black sheep he hasn't troubled you much."

"Good reason why; my father shipped him off to Africa twenty-six years ago, and he's never been rich enough to afford the passage home, and as he's got fourteen children I should say he never would manage to scrape it together. Then there's Vera has taken up the crotchet. She's dull, and actually wants us to invite one of her African cousins to come and keep her company; as her mother says, we won't have any barbarians at Normanhurst in our time."

"But Africans are not barbarians; I came home with some very decent specimens."

"Decent or not, I'll not invite any of the Miss Bradleys here; why, I might never get rid of them again. If I had any of the family I'd not mind a look at the boy. I suppose as things are, even if I do cut off the entail, he'll have to be Sir James Norman some day."

"Why do you call them Bradley?"

"Because it's my precious brother's second Christian name, Cyril Bradley, he was baptized, and he's been plain Mr. Bradley for a good many years."

"Well, all I can say is, Uncle Robert, the world is a very small place."

"Hey? what are you driving at? You don't mean you've met Cyril? Africans don't go to St. Helena for change of air, do they?"

"Not that ever I heard of. I've not met your brother" (he might have added 'I hope I never shall' but refrained), but one of my fellow-passengers was Jim Bradley, as nice a young fellow as you'd care to meet; he and I were great friends. I knew he'd come over to see about some legal business, but the name Bradley told me nothing, though I did wonder sometimes why his face seemed so familiar to me."

"What! you've actually seen him?"

"Messaged at the same table with him for three weeks. He's a true Norman, tall, muscular, blue eyes, fair hair, rather sunburnt, but very good-looking."

"And gentlemanly," groaned Sir Robert; "but I suppose I daren't expect that."

"Bradley's something more than 'gentlemanly,'" replied Lord Barry, "he's a gentleman; his clothes don't look as fashionable as if a Bond-street tailor had supplied them, and he has seen nothing bigger than Cape Town, but he's a nice, honest, true-hearted young fellow, and if Barry Court was ready for visitors I should have pressed him to come and spend a month with me, though as he is due in Africa again by Easter I doubt if he'd have accepted."

"You seem to like him!"

"I do, extremely."

The carriage was dashing up the avenue. Sir Robert looked fondly at his grand old home.

"It's hard to give up the hope of leaving this place to one of my own children. I suppose, Mowbray, when you sing the young fellow's praises you realise that you and Vera would be the losers if he had his wish."

"Vera has never expected Normanhurst until a few months ago."

"Neither, presumably, has Master James!" retorted Sir Robert.

"Vera will in any case be very rich," said Mowbray, gravely. "If the entail is cut off, poor Jim will never have a shilling but what he earns as traveller for a colonial wool merchant."

"Commercial traveller!" groaned Sir Robert, "that's what we should call it in England. To think of a bagman ruling here!"

"Don't think of it," said Lord Barry, kindly,

"as it distresses you. Only, Uncle Robert, before Jim goes back to the colony see him just once, and recognise him as your nephew. You couldn't help liking him, and, if only prejudice would allow it, you might feel proud of him."

"I shouldn't," said Sir Robert, shortly. "Ah, here comes Vera!"

Lord Barry and his cousin shook hands, both perfectly aware her father expected them to exchange a warmer greeting. Then they went to the drawing-room, where Lady Norman sat before a tray of silver and china ready to dispense afternoon tea.

Mowbray's first thought as he kissed her was what a friend his Aunt Alice would be for poor Honor, if he could only bring them together; but this was impossible for the present, since Lady Norman's eyes were so quick that they would certainly read his secret; and what sympathy would she have for the unhappy girl who was the cause of him declining to marry her own child?

It was a painful evening. The gaps death had made were so fresh and keen, and Vera seemed to have lost all her old ease with her cousin.

She hardly spoke to him at all during the long dinner, and when leaving Sir Robert over his wine Mowbray went to the drawing-room, it was to find his aunt alone.

Vera had vanished.

"Aunt Alice," he said, in a low tone, "have you told Vera anything? Is that why she will have nothing to say to me?"

"I told her about my brother's will," Lady Norman looked very troubled. "It seemed to me best."

"Do you think she resents my not speaking before I left England?"

"I am sure she does not. I am afraid, Mowbray, your father's scheme will be very difficult to accomplish. Vera is like a spoilt child."

"And she dislikes me?"

"She likes you as a cousin. She declares you care nothing about her, and seems to think she prefers a single life to any other."

Lord Barry sighed.

"I thought his boys' loss would have changed Uncle Robert's wishes."

"It has only made him set his heart more firmly on the plan."

"And you, Aunt Alice?"

"I am very fond of you, Mowbray; but I don't believe you care enough for Vera. You would marry her because you think yourself bound, but you could not give her the love her nature craves."

Lord Barry took his aunt's hand.

"I have come here to day feeling like a scoundrel. I simply dared not write it to Uncle Robert. I will tell you the truth, Aunt Alice, I cannot marry my cousin Vera, because I love some one else."

"Mowbray!"

"Don't think worse of me than you can help. Three weeks ago, if my feeling for Vera was not love, at least I could honestly say I cared for no one else; but now the mischief is done. I want your advice. Shall I speak to my uncle or shall I wait? Don't you think it will dawn on him soon that Vera's manner to me is enough to remove all chance of our union?"

Lady Norman's decision was prompt.

"Say nothing to my husband, Mowbray; he is such a proud man, it would be almost torture to him to think his daughter had been offered to you—and scorned."

"Don't say that," the young lord blushed like a woman; "you know I have never had a disrespectful thought of Vera. . . . I used to fancy we could go through life together pretty comfortably . . . that was before I knew what love was."

"Who is it?" demanded Lady Norman.

"Who is what?"

"Who has taught you what love is?"

His voice, hushed to a low tone almost of reverence, as he answered,—

"The loveliest woman I ever saw, and I do think one of the best; but Aunt Alice I was too late . . . she was another's."

"Poor Mowbray," Lady Norman's eyes rested

on him pityingly "but did she encourage you?"

"She never dreamed I cared for her . . . when I told her of my hopes she seemed almost stunned. She asked my pardon for having made me suffer, she said she never dreamed of my feeling that for her, and it was too late."

"Was her lover on board too?"

"Oh no . . . she has only come over with her brother, she had never been in England before."

"What is her name?"

"Honor."

"Honor," repeated Lady Norman in surprise, "why that is one of our names, my husband's grandmother and his young sister were both called Honor; it was the name of my eldest girl who died when Vera was a baby. How strange that you should fall in love with an Honor?"

She little guessed that it was with one who had once been an Honor Norman.

Mowbray said nothing more of his own romance, and his aunt had only time to beg him to take no steps with regard to Vera until she had spoken to him again, when Sir Robert came in and proposed a game of whist.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. JOHNSON could accommodate the travellers, and Honor felt a strange sense of 'home' when she found herself in a large second floor sitting-room pouring out Jim's tea. If only they could go on together, she and her brother alone, just they two, why life would not be so very terrible after all.

But it could not be. Jim had only six or seven weeks to spend in England, then the parting must come. Well, at least she would do her best to make those weeks a pleasant time to him, no need to trouble him with her regrets, those could wait till she was alone.

"Jim," she said cheerfully, "have you thought of any plan? Shall you write to Uncle Robert?"

"I mean to call on his lawyer to-morrow," replied her brother; "you see, Honor, what I want to know is if they can cut off the entail against my wishes . . . I won't plead to Sir Robert for what may be my simple right."

"We must send our address to Sandstone," said Honor. "I wonder when the mail goes!"

"Saturday morning; but Mr. Maitland arranged to write to me at his agent's, otherwise it would have been six weeks before I could hear anything."

"It will be a week before we hear now," said Honor, thinking the first letter would surely bring the news of her husband's arrival at Sandstone, in pursuit of her.

"Yes; will you go with me to Mr. Gresham, Honor? I wish you would."

"I fancy he will tell you more if you go alone, Jim, and I mean to be very busy unpacking your things."

"I shall be back early, and then we will go sight-seeing. I'll buy a map of London. There's such a lot to do, we ought not to lose a single day."

"And the days are so short," agreed Honor. "Do you know, Jim, it feels so funny to know we've relations in England and not the least chance of seeing them, and when the landlady speaks of you as Mr. Norman, I keep thinking she means some one else."

"It was better to give our real name," he replied, "whatever happens, Honor, I shall never sign myself Jim Bradley again."

It was Honor who reminded him, as he was starting the next morning, that it would only be courteous to call on Mr. Maitland's London agent and leave his address.

"There can't be any letters yet," objected Jim.

"No; but Mr. Maitland took the trouble to write to him about you, and I think it would be nice."

"All right. And Honor, dear, I want you to have some money, and go and buy yourself frocks and things. You'll want a warm jacket, oh, and heaps of things."

Honor smiled.

"I know I must do some shopping. I mean to ask Mrs. Johnson to tell me where to go; but, Jim, dear, I won't take your money; that kind Mrs. Maitland would give me twenty pounds. She said in England people thought such a lot about dress."

"And you are so pretty, Honor," said Jim in his boyish way. "If we do get an invitation to Normanhurst, I should like you to look your best."

He was gone. Honor resisted the temptation to sit down and cry and went down to secure a few minutes with the landlady who was disposed to take a great interest in the new comers.

"Yes, Miss Norman, you'll get anything you want in the Upper-street, and a penny tram from Gray's-inn-road, will take you there at once. I'm going that way myself if you'd like me just to put you in the right road."

"It would be very kind of you," said Honor, gratefully. "I feel so strange here."

"Of course you do, Miss, and anything in my power I'm glad to do for anyone of my lord's family."

Honor started at the last word, and looked so puzzled that the good woman explained.

"It was Captain Barry, you said, who told you of my rooms. Maybe, he didn't know when you saw him of his father's death; but he's been Lord Barry some weeks now, and with no disrespect to him that's dead and gone, the captain will make a better master than his father in his best days."

Honor felt her breath come in quick gasps. Lord Barry. It was an English peer who had pleaded for her love. Well, no rank could make him nobler than he was already.

"I did not know Captain Barry was the heir to a title," she said slowly, "and, Mrs. Johnson, I can't claim to be 'one of the family.' We never saw the Captain till we met him on board the *Spaniard*."

"But you're Miss Norman, and it's your uncle who lives at Normanhurst," protested the landlady.

"Yes, Sir Robert Norman is our uncle."

"And Lady Norman is the Captain's own aunt," explained Mrs. Johnson. "The Honorable Miss Barry she was, and a sweet young lady too, so you see, miss, you do belong to the family. You and my lord are sort of cousins."

Two truths dawned slowly on Honor. The "uncle" Mowbray was staying with must surely be Sir Robert Norman, the cousin for whom an old family compact designed him as husband must be her cousin too, here and Jim's. It was only by a mighty effort poor Honor turned the conversation, and set Mrs. Johnson busy extolling the splendours of the shops in Upper-street, Islington.

Meanwhile Jim had not been idle. The name of Norman was so well-known in Mr. Gresham's office that the clerks made no attempt to deny their chief, and returned from his private room with a message that he would see the colonial in a few minutes.

When Jim was ushered into his presence he found himself being scrutinized by an old gentleman with silvery hair and shrewd dark eyes. Mr. Gresham at last put out his hand kindly, saying,—

"We lawyers are supposed to deal only with proofs; but I will admit, Mr. Norman, that you carry your pedigree in your face; you resemble Sir Robert more closely than did his own boys. I conclude you are Mr. Cyril's eldest son."

"Yes."

"And you are here as his ambassador?"

"I am here in defiance of his wishes. My father is in broken health, the colonial doctors say his constitution is so shattered, he cannot live many years, and if he is not very careful it may not be many months. He will waive his rights for ten thousand pounds, which he thinks will provide for his last days. I—I have come to England to try and defend my right one day to be Norman of Normanhurst."

"I don't blame you," said the lawyer. "Well, I'm your uncle's adviser, so you mustn't expect me to take your part; but this much as man to man, I will say, the deed of entail is worded so

vaguely, that I can't say positively your objections would prevent the arrangement between your father and Sir Robert. It is a very nice point of law and would have to be tried by the Court of Chancery, which would entail a great loss of time and money; but I may tell you this much, Mr. Norman, Sir Robert's objections are to your father personally, and if he were assured there was little chance of his brother Cyril surviving him, and you would be a worthy master of the estate, I think there would be no further talk of cutting off the entail. Naturally, both Sir Robert and his wife would have liked the place to go to their daughter; but Miss Vera is already amply provided for, and, as she has all the Norman beauty, she is sure to marry young."

Jim rose to depart.

"I shall write to Sir Robert by to-night's post," said Mr. Gresham, "and if he extends the olive branch, and asks you to visit him at the Hall, I hope you will see your way to accepting. I don't deny that you *might* prevent the entail being cut off if you went to law about it, but it would be far pleasanter for everyone concerned if Sir Robert were so satisfied with his nephew as not to wish to disturb the existing arrangements."

Jim felt tolerably contented at the result of his visit. He strolled into a confectioner's and had some lunch, then remembering his promise to Honor, he presented himself at the office of Mr. Maitland's English agent.

A young clerk took down Mr. Norman's address, and promised to forward letters, only regretting neither of the partners were disengaged; then, as though suddenly recollecting something, he added,—

"There's a cablegram here, addressed Norman; it came a fortnight ago, but we kept it, not knowing where to send it. I suppose it's for you?"

Jim took it, wondering the while what anyone could have to say to him justifying such an expense. The paper almost fell from his hand as he read the message, and yet the astute clerk thought his expression was more of relief than sorrow.

This is what Jim read,—

"Warren buried to-day."—Maitland.

Just those three words; but oh, the difference they made in Honor's fate!

Jim staggered out into the February sunshine, feeling nothing mattered very much now his sister was free.

(Continued on page 453.)

A WOMAN'S TRIUMPH.

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CHAPTER XXV.

EVEN in a moment of weakness to herself, and not unnatural alarm at the sight of Richard Butler's weakness, Patricia could not resist a feeling of intense joy and relief as Thorold's tall figure came hurriedly forward, and his strong hand clasped itself about her thin cold one.

It was evident to Lady Settefeld that the eagerness, the pleasure Thorold evinced at sight of Patricia was absolutely sincere, absolutely true.

Miriam needless to say was conscious of a swift sensation of jealous anger, but almost instantly her mind was claimed by the events of the moment.

"You called me, Patricia," she began, and then she caught sight of the prostrate figure on the floor, and shrank back alarmed, uncertain. "What is the matter? Who is this?" she stammered.

Thorold had only paused to give one firm tender grasp of the hand to Patricia, then he had obeyed the direction of her eyes, and had gone forward and knelt beside Richard Butler's unconscious form. As he turned the man over a little on one side the light from the window fell on the death-like face, and a faint, yet sharp, exclamation escaped Miriam's lips.

Patricia felt her eyes drawn as by some magnetic force to fix themselves upon her sister.

in-law's face; the expression written upon Miriam's beauty at this moment was one that filled her with sudden fear, with horror, and swiftly afterwards with a terrible, an awful sorrow. No need for Patricia to seek now for the truth of her doubt, of her suspicion, about Miriam in connection with the Butlers. By her attitude, by her expression, by the ghastly pallor and alarm that spread over the whole countenance, Patricia knew only too well that there was indeed some secret in the life of her brother's wife, which, if exposed, would mean total destruction to her brother's heart, and to the happiness he cherished so dearly. This knowledge, Miriam's startled look and exclamation, and Thorold's quick demand for some stimulant, all passed in far less time than it takes to write it down.

Miriam caught at Thorold's words.

"Brandy—yes—yes—of course—I will go; I will send!"

She was trembling in every limb. Patricia noticed that she moved feebly as one stricken with an illness when she turned to go out of the room; at any other time Patricia must have felt deep pity spring up in her heart for the other woman's weakness for her too evident suffering, but now—now, with the weight of her fulfilled presentiments of a possible, an overwhelming disaster hanging over her head, Patricia could realize nothing but her feeling of horror for Miriam, and her unutterable sense of grief for her brother.

She stood with one hand leaning on a chair, watching Thorold lift the fallen man almost easily in his strong arms, and place him back on the big leather couch. He sent more than one glance across at the girl standing there, so tall—so white—so troubled, as he fulfilled this task.

"You must not stay here," he said to her several times. "You are not strong enough, Lady Patricia."

But the girl would not move, her eyes followed his hands as they ministered to the poor young man lying so inert, so like a dead creature on the pillows.

"He has been very ill," she said, breaking her silence at last, and speaking in a dull tired voice. "He—he was waiting to see Danvers. He walked here, and was too fatigued. I fear he is not fit for any work just yet, poor man."

"Work!" The word escaped Thorold's lips like an exclamation; to himself came the quick thought this man would never know the meaning of work again. The butler came hurrying in at this moment with brandy, and almost immediately was followed by Lord Settefeld.

The Earl took in the situation at a glance. Then with a touch of the old tenderness that nothing could ever utterly destroy, he went up to his sister and led her away.

"What do you mean by standing about like this when you are only just out of bed, Pat?" he said reprovingly, but there was such real love and solicitude in the voice, that the words went straight to Patricia's heart, and brought tears to her eyes.

She let him take her up to a chair by the hall fire, and put her in it, arranging her comfortably out of the draughts.

"I am afraid your *protégé* is in a bad way, Pat," he said as he did all this.

"He is very ill," the girl answered him.

She watched him go from her with dumb lips, and yearning, unhappy eyes. It hurt her, though, why she could not have fully explained, to see him go back into the same room that held Richard Butler. There was some great, some terrible mystery connected with Miriam and this man and his mother, and even though fate might ordain that the mystery would never be solved, still Patricia's great love and strong, pure, proud heart shrank from the close association of her dear brother with this mystery.

She sent her eyes round nervously when she was alone. Miriam was nowhere in sight for the moment.

She had evidently given orders to the butler to carry the brandy into the library, and now was gone probably to her own room to consider her position and rally her forces to meet whatever might come.

Patricia's heart was beating with painful force in her breast; she was so weak, it was in moments such as these she realised how much the last year had undermined her strength, and she laid the greatest cause of this to the fierce mental strain through which she had passed and was still passing.

Before the separation from Danvers, before the question of his marriage, and all the attendant difficulties that had come into her life, Patricia had been quite another creature.

Never exactly robust, nor very full of animal life and spirits, still brighter and stronger altogether than she was now, with a heart as light as air.

She sat leaning back in her chair white and cold, with the trouble at her heart.

She could scarcely have defined each thought that came thronging into her mind and pressing upon her brain. Everything was chaotic, full of evil possibilities and shadows; nervous apprehensions overwhelmed her, mingling with pain and bitterness when she recalled her brother's devotion, her brother's infatuation for his wife, of his belief in Miriam's goodness and purity, of the terrible future which might be before him were this woman's true self to be revealed to him suddenly, as it might so surely be, through this curious tangle of circumstances.

With the knowledge she had of Miriam so keen in her mind, Patricia was assured that by every trick and turn of her subtle, cunning, unscrupulous nature, Miriam would work to prevent any catastrophe, and very probably she would succeed in so doing.

There was no doubt that Jane Butler had desired nothing so much as to shrink away from all contact with Lady Settefeld, even avoiding all chance of seeing her or being seen by her. Might it not therefore be a very natural deduction that the son would have the same sentiments as his mother?

And this being so, might it not be an easy matter for Miriam to arrange circumstances entirely for her own advantage and satisfaction?

One thing was very sure Patricia could see, and that was that Richard Butler's chance of doing any injury to Miriam, even supposing he desired such a thing, was now a very frail one.

The girl felt an immense pity for the poor young man whose life was fast fleeing away.

She knew nothing of him, but just as she had been attracted by his mother's homely honesty, so she had been touched by the man's refinement, and by a sort of pathetic resignation in his weakness, which she realised without understanding.

There did not seem to be any strong spirit of evil, of malice, of revenge possible in that pale, worn, stricken creature, yet there was no denying that he held some great, some horrible power over Miriam, sufficient to break down her calm, self-control, and to produce such overwhelming fear as Patricia had read in her sister-in-law's face a few moments before.

The girl sighed a deep, bitter, painful sigh, and her eyes closed unconsciously for a time. When she opened them again some one had come very softly towards the big fire-place and was standing looking down on her with an expression of tenderest anxiety and gravity.

Patricia tried to smile up at Thorold.

"How is that poor creature?" she asked in her faint, pretty voice.

Thorold did not answer her immediately.

"How are you, Lady Patricia?" was what he said when he did speak.

"I am better, much better, Mr. Musgrove."

He looked at her again in silence. The thought forced itself on him anew that this gentle and beautiful girl was suffering, not merely from physical weakness, but from some mental trouble that was eating into her heart and wasting her strength.

"I do not think you are much better," he said after awhile. "If—if you belonged to me, I should send you back to bed again, and command you to remain there for many days."

Patricia's pale face had grown suddenly rose coloured, illumined with a sort of radiance he had never seen on it before.

"If you belonged to me!"

The words ran like fire in her chilled veins,

sending a gleam of golden happiness into the midst of her oppression and trouble.

"If you belonged to me!"

What five simple little words! Who could believe a whole history of divinest possibilities of happiness, too great to be described, was carried in those words?

The girl's small, proud head drooped a little beneath the flood of hot emotion these words roused within her.

"You—you are a tyrant, then?" she said, trying to laugh and succeeding only faintly.

"Anxiety makes one tyrannical," Thorold said. He was not conscious of speaking very easily, his eyes were fixed on that fair young face that now had grown back into its former pallor; his heart was stirred in that same yearning, tender fashion that had been almost his daily emotion during his mother's long illness. He made the discovery suddenly that he had exactly the same feelings for Patricia de Burgh as he had been wont to have for his beloved, suffering mother. The discovery pained him a little even while it thrilled him.

He laughed faintly.

"I am afraid I am very presumptuous, Lady Patricia," he said, unsteadily, betraying far more than he was aware in his voice, in his words, "I ought to remember I am not one of your very old friends, neither am I—"

He broke off.

Patricia bent forward and stretched out her hand.

"Please do not say you are not my friend," she said with pretty wistfulness. "I—I am touched by your thought for me, Mr. Musgrove; and I will confess to you that, though I am better, I am not very strong yet. I expect I shall be as well as possible as soon as the spring is over and the summer come. Tell me something of that poor man! He is very ill, I fear!"

Thorold answered the last question with quiet emphasis.

"Very," he said; "very—very ill. In fact so ill, that I am amazed he has managed to get out of his bed. I have left him with your brother. I understand he has come up here to speak about some appointment; but he is, undoubtedly, quite unfit for work."

Patricia listened with feelings that were not easy for her to classify, and Thorold went on speaking.

"I am afraid the sight of his illness must have alarmed Lady Settefeld; yet I was prepared for something, the sound of your voice told me you were alarmed."

"I was frightened," Patricia said.

She was, indeed, frightened; fearful of each new moment that came. The mere thought that Danvers was alone with that man—the man who held the key to some great secret in Miriam's life, was hurtful to Patricia.

Whilst Thorold stood near her, however, so long as she heard the sound of his deep, strong voice, and realised the indescribable comfort of his presence, the sharpness of Patricia's fear and anxiety was not so enforced.

She had grown to think of him so much in her hours of solitude, she had told to herself so often the many qualities of his character, that he did not now seem strange to her in the very least. On the contrary she seemed to turn to him most naturally even in a moment fraught with so many probable evils as this particular one.

"Lord Settefeld is going to look after him. Poor fellow, he is begging to be sent to the hospital, he does not want to continue giving so much trouble—he is staying somewhere on the estate is he not?"

"With the head keeper and his wife—they have nursed him through a most serious illness. I feel a little anxious about him for it was through me he came here at all."

Thorold smiled at her.

"You are not going to imagine surely that you are to blame for his illness—why that would be very foolish, Lady Patricia, and very wrong; here comes your brother. I am sure he will confirm my words if you ask him."

Patricia turned to her brother in a manner so fraught with nervousness that Thorold was conscious of feeling pained as well as surprised.

The girl scanned her brother's face.

There was nothing new in it, and no change in its usual expression—he only looked a little thoughtful. At the first sound of his voice Patricia gave a sharp sigh—it was a sigh of relief—the tension on her nerves was terrible. She did not know what she dreaded—yet she lived in dread every instant of something happening, something escaping from that mystery which she alone had guessed, and which might carry such utter destruction to her brother's heart.

The Earl noticed her white face.

"My dear Pat, I am quite anxious about you," he said; "it was most unlucky you should have been in the library just now; but you must not let a little thing of this sort trouble you so much, dear. Butler is considerably better. I am just going to drive him back to Smithson's myself. I wish you would let me persuade you to go up to your room again. I shall telegraph for Sir Henry Graves to come down and prescribe for you, if you don't get better very soon."

"I have been telling Lady Patricia I am sure she would be wiser to rest and nurse herself a little longer," Thorold said eagerly.

Patricia laughed hurriedly and nervously. "You are so true to your sex—you two," she said with an attempt at lightness which was not very successful. "Danvers, you have always one idea, if any one is ill to send them to bed and keep them there for ever, and I see that Mr. Musgrove is just the same as you! Well, I am sorry to disappoint you; but—I am not going to bed. I feel much better, and I am going to remain where I am."

The Earl shook his head.

"Wait till I come back, and I will discuss the matter. Musgrove, if you are doing nothing, perhaps you will come with me."

"Danvers," Patricia called back her brother, hurriedly, "about this poor man!" she asked in a low nerveless voice, "What—what are you going to arrange about him?"

"Oh! he must stay with Smithson till he is at any rate a little stronger. It is simply absurd to discuss the question of his doing anything as he is at present. If he does not get better in a week's time, I shall send him off somewhere for change of air and sunshine. He seems a very superior man, Pat. I find he speaks several languages and has evidently been well educated. Where did you say you picked him up?"

Patricia had to exercise an almost fierce effort to control herself sufficiently to repeat her story of helping Mrs. Butler and of interesting herself in the son.

"And his mother is out of England?" the Earl queried. "Well, that is unfortunate; for the man ought to have someone belonging to him near at hand in case....! However, we must do what we can for him, and as soon as he is fit for anything, I will try and find him some work in the house. I want the library rearranged and re-catalogued, he might be able to do that."

Patricia turned ghastly white at these last words. The picture they conjured up was so full of hurt to her. To have her dear brother living, perhaps day after day in close contact with one who was, she knew, now bound up in some secret and potent way with the past of her brother's wife was altogether a horrible, an impossible, thing for Patricia to accept, and weak though she was, she determined resolutely to exert all her power to prevent a state of things which would be nothing less, she declared passionately to herself, than an insult to her brother's pride and faith and love.

It might, indeed, be something worse than a mere insult—who could know what hideous truth lay at the bottom of this connection between Miriam and the Butlers?—Might not the shadow of dishonour lurk about it, and if so would not the dishonour of the wife spread even to the husband even though he were utterly unconscious of it?

These burning, bitter questions rushed wildly through Patricia's overwrought mind as she sat and watched her brother and Thorold Musgrove pass out of the hall.

The girl clenched her delicate hands as she sat

there alone in a mental agony that was far greater than any pain; and as she sat, two big resolutions sprang up in her heart.

The resolution to speak openly to Miriam, and the resolution to do everything in her power to stand between her brother and the truth, between her brother and possible dishonour!

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHEN Thorold came back from accompanying the Earl to the head keeper's cottage he found the hall empty and Patricia gone.

"That is well," he said to himself, for he hoped at once she had obeyed her brother's wish and had gone to her own room to rest.

Nevertheless he had a curious sense of loss, of desolation, upon him as he stood there looking at the empty chair where Patricia had sat just a short while before.

He was glad she was resting, but he had come back from the grounds with a strange eagerness. He wanted to be with Patricia again.

He sat down himself in the big chair and stared into the fire. What was this new phase that was coming over him, this yearning tenderness, this anxiety over Patricia De Burgh? What was there possible between Patricia de Burgh and himself?

Let him put things plainly before him.

He was a poor man, a working man, a man who possessed nothing but brains, endurance and ambitions.

Patricia was the daughter of one Earl, the sister of another. Her mother was married to a royal Duke.

Patricia's sphere was absolutely apart, above from his sphere. It was almost presumptuous to aspire to a warm friendship with a girl so patrician, so rich, so highly placed as she; yet Thorold not only aspired, he possessed Patricia's friendship.

His heart beat a little more quickly as he sat looking in the fire.

Yes, she was his friend. She took a deep interest in him. She had pleasure in his society. He had seen her face light up when he came near to her. It was impossible for him to shut away that fact.

Patricia liked him. She called him her friend. She was happy when he was near.

The thrill at his heart grew greater.

Now, let him examine himself; let him see where he stood! He had gone through a great mental battle; he had sustained a crushing defeat, yet the defeat had not been overwhelmingly disastrous.

For the space of a few months he had lived in a fool's paradise—in a golden madness, built and sustained by nothing but his own folly, vanity, worldly ignorance and by a sort of infatuation, such as he supposed came to all men at the beginning of their lives.

He had suffered so acutely when the blow came, and his castle of vain hopes and dreams came tumbling about his ears, that he had said to himself life for him was ended, at least where love and sentiment was concerned, and, for a time, the words he had said to himself were absolutely true.

In those first days of Miriam's marriage Thorold went about like a man stunned—a man bereft of everything—the very heart out of his body seemed to have been torn from him by the upheaval of his dream castle.

Looking back now he realised that it had been not pride alone that had sustained him and pushed him on in his path of hard work, it had been the influence of another being—a strange influence it was too. The memory of a promise given one grey November day in the dirt-grimed gardens of a London square, and the image of his sainted mother hovering over this promise.

This had been the sole comfort, the sole strength to him in those dark hours when disappointment lay upon him as heavily and as cruelly as a death, and Thorold, as he realized this fact so truly, felt his whole heart yearn and turn towards the girl who had given him this comfort.

He had not thought of her much in those days,

her memory had been as vague and as visionary as the memory of his dead mother; but, when he had met her again that night at her aunt's house, and afterwards when he had stayed in the house with her, the good influence she exercised upon him grew, and grew, and grew. It had been daily contact with Patricia that had calmed him and prepared him for the ordeal of his first meeting with Miriam.

He had suffered in that first meeting; that he did not and could not deny, but the suffering had lasted a very short time.

He knew as he sat here gazing into the fire, a guest in Miriam's house, that the sharpness of his disappointment had been, in a sense, his cure.

He had loved instantly, and most unwisely, he had worshipped a myth—a creature that did not exist; his disillusionment was bitterly sharp, but it was complete.

He could meet Miriam as easily as he could meet any other woman, and though he was now under her roof, and was in daily contact with her, he experienced no emotion whatever.

In fact he was irritated, and in a sense amused at the ease with which he had fallen a victim to her fascinations.

He told himself, with a touch of contempt, that he had behaved like a schoolboy and not like a man, forgetting that in every man in love there is the distinct element of the schoolboy; and though his admiration for Lady Settefeld's beauty was absolutely unchanged, he was no longer blinded by infatuation to the failings in her mental construction. Thorold, indeed, accepted Miriam for what she was—a beautiful coquette, full of physical charm, but a pauper—at least contrasting her with Patricia—not only in the beauties of the mind but in truth, and depth, and sincerity of character.

He understood everything now, and knew that she had settled to be Settefeld's wife even while she had given him the undoubted encouragement she had done. He no longer puzzled over that strange profession of hatred for Lord Settefeld; he realized it was only one of her many little tricks to impress him, hold him, and play with him.

Had she been of any stronger calibre Thorold might have grown to hate Miriam; as it was; he treated her with the sort of easy indifference he would have bestowed on an extremely selfish, beautiful, spoilt child.

And as he was easily imagined, Miriam had been quick to see this, and quick to resent it. She was furious with him, and furious with herself for having brought him down to the house. Things had not been going in the very least as Miriam desired they should do. She had been annoyed with Patricia, annoyed with Neville Blaneville for giving to Patricia the admiration he had always denied her, annoyed with her sister Dolly for the news of her engagement to Sir John Donuthorne, annoyed with everything and everyone, and with no one so much as with Thorold.

The man knew this perfectly.

He smiled to himself at the thought, but there was a sadness in his smile as he leaned back, his eyes still fixed on the glowing coals.

"Miriam would have liked to keep my heart as a plaything," he said to himself; "she would never have stooped to be my wife. My love was a nonsense to her, a thing to amuse her when she was dull. No doubt she found me a clumsy uncouth brute, and was highly contemptuous that I, a working man, should have dared to dream dreams about her; still she would like to keep me at her feet, she did not value or understand my love, but she does not care to lose it as she has done. Are all women fashioned as she is?"

The image of Patricia's sweet, thoughtful, soulful eyes, rose before him as the question came into his mind, and the thrilling beat of his heart came back again as he thought of Patricia. Suddenly he rose to his feet, he had the air of one who is arming himself against an attack.

"Thought is dangerous," he said to himself. "I must not think of her, she is my friend, Heaven bless her. I must be content with that, my hope carried me on a fool's errand once. I must be wise in future; not that the fate that

she would deal out to me could ever be anything but just, tender, and gentle. Still she is above me, our paths lie wide apart, let me never forget that fact, for it is vital, and can never be overcome!"

The day was drawing to evening.

Patricia was sitting in her room. Maxton was downstairs for a time.

Patricia had remained in her room all the afternoon. Dolly came in at tea-time and gave her news of the day.

"You must try and come down to-night, dear," Dolly had said in her gentle way to Patricia. "There is to be some mysterious amusement, Babs and Thorold have been shut up in the library all the time since lunch. I cannot tell you what they are going to do, but it is evidently something very important and grand!"

"Babs is a genius," Patricia said, laughing slightly, but Dolly caught the sound of the trouble in the laughter.

"What is it, I wonder!" she asked herself as she had done so many times of late, "what is the trouble—it—it is not Thorold, something tells me it is not, just as something also tells me that it is connected with Mimi. I wish Patricia would speak to me, her eyes go to my heart. They hurt me. If Danvers were not so taken up with Mimi and his life generally, he must see it too. Poor Patricia, I wish I could help her, it is worse to-day!"

She let no sign of her deep interest escape her, however. She chatted of every sort of thing, of her engagement (this bravely, poor child, how little Patricia guessed what Dolly's light merry tone cost her). Of her mother and her sister, of anything that would interest Patricia. She gave Pat the information she needed.

"Mimi has been for a long ride with Danvers. They are just home," Dolly said, "they seem to have enjoyed themselves, at any rate, they are in very good spirits."

Patricia winced a little as she listened.

Then Miriam had determined on being bold, on carrying things with a strong, high hand.

There was to be no *eclandre* or no confidences. Evidently, though she had been so greatly alarmed at first, the danger was not so pressing as Patricia had imagined.

Of course, Richard Butler's condition was the strongest aid to Miriam in this moment. While the man was so ill he was harmless, and no doubt now that she knew where he was, and how things stood, Miriam would be prepared on every side.

Patricia felt a thrill of anger and disgust too pass through her for the woman who was her brother's most dearly cherished wife.

"I will speak to her," she said to herself, and after awhile Dolly had gone away, and she had remained sitting alone.

She heard Miriam and Danvers come upstairs; Miriam was laughing, and the man's voice was low and tender as it always was with his wife.

Patricia's heart contracted as she listened.

Oh! he must always be spared, by all means in her power, at any amount of suffering to herself her dear brother must be spared the knowledge that had come alas! to her so fully. His very life was woven into his love now. Let his love be torn from him!

Patricia shivered and hid her face in her hands.

She sat a while longer, and when the hour was drawing near for Maxton to come upstairs, she rose and made her way to Miriam's boudoir.

The room was on the same passage, a little further along.

Patricia knocked at the door, and Miriam's voice called to her gaily to enter.

Lady Settefeld had exchanged her habit for a dainty peignoir and was very busy sorting out some ribbons and feathers from a number of boxes.

"If it is you, Babs, I am not ready yet. You shall—" Miriam broke off as she looked up.

"Oh! Patricia!" she said, and then she was very silent and her face took a hard, cold look.

"It is coming!" she said to herself. Quickly, however, the smiles came back to her lips.

"Dear Patricia, how good of you to come and see me. Look what a confusion I am in. Babs is arranging a cotillon for to-night, and she wants



"HOW IS THAT POOR CREATURE?" PATRICIA ASKED, IN HER FAINT PRETTY VOICE.

All the feathers and ribbons I can give her. I hope you are feeling better, Pat dear."

Patricia stood very tall and proud in the midst of the multi-coloured ribbons. She always felt nonplussed by Miriam's bright, laughing manner; at the present moment it not only jarred upon her, but it seemed to show her the enormous difficulty of ever dealing with Miriam.

A smart maid was hovering about, bringing fresh boxes from this place and that.

"I have enough to stock a shop, have I not?" Miriam laughed merrily.

She gave several sharp glances at Patricia. There was a look in the girl's proud, white face that gave Miriam a chill sensation. It was always her desire and her *métier* to avoid ever coming to a point if possible, and as a rule she succeeded in obtaining her desire.

She knew, however, that there could be no shirking with Patricia now.

She set her teeth and cursed the girl bitterly, just as in the early morning she had sat frightened to death yet keenly equal to uttering curses on the contrary fate that pursued her at every turn.

Was it not enough that she should have sustained such an awful blow as the discovery of Cyril Lindsey's valet and foster-brother under her very roof, without having to endure cross-examination from the hands of the one person whom she hated and feared as she now hated and feared Patricia?

Things had gone marvellously well. The news that Butler had been unable to betray her even by word or sign, that he was a dying man, and that he had been conveyed back to the keeper's cottage where Miriam prayed earnestly he might pass away before many more hours had gone, had been most welcome to her. She had quickly recovered herself and her spirits.

Her husband had not known of her presence in the library whilst Butler had fainted till she had spoken of it. She was always careful to tell Settefeld as much of the truth as was possible—

she had considered it wise to let him know she had been in the library at this time.

"It was an unfortunate affair," the Earl had said. "Poor chap, one cannot help being sorry for him; but I was a little sharp with Smithson for allowing him to come up so far by himself, he was not fit for it. It seems, however, he would come. He wanted to see me and to express his gratitude to Patricia, who, by the way, is none the better I am sure, my darling, for having been frightened by his fainting fit."

"Poor Patricia!" Miriam said, softly, "she is so sensitive," she had seemed to ponder a little while before she spoke again, then she had asked her husband a question. "Patricia seems much interested in this man, Danvers, dear; do you know anything about him?"

The Earl shook his head. "Absolutely nothing," he answered. "As a matter of fact, I am not very clear as to how Patricia knows him either—he is the son of some one of her many poor pensioners, I suppose. Well, poor creature, he will not trouble this world I fear much longer."

"I wonder Patricia never told me about the man. I would have gone to see him, Danvers," Miriam said in a slow way with just a little touch of reproach in her tone for the absent Patricia; and then she had sighed, "but it is so silly of me to expect the impossible, isn't it, darling?"

Of course the Earl had looked grave at this, as he always did at any fresh suggestion of lack of sympathy between Miriam and his sister.

"I daresay Pat never thought about it, my dear one," was what he said.

"Oh! very probably," Miriam had declared in her brightest manner; "still, of course, I was tremendously surprised when I arrived at the library this morning, and found Patricia greatly upset, and a strange man fainting on the floor. Had I known about him and how ill he was, I should certainly have taken measures to prevent him coming up here and upsetting Patricia who is quite delicate enough as it is!"

Now, while she had said this in her brightest

and sweetest way—a thought had suddenly flashed into Miriam's brain.

It was not a big thought, yet it was so sharp, so full of subtle fire, that it had taken her breath away for the moment, and then the thought had gone, and Miriam had grown her usual laughing self.

She was dancing and laughing on the edge of an open grave; but she was not going to stop and consider that—besides she had lived so long beside this grave that fear had grown a little dull. The afternoon had passed, and Miriam grew more and more composed.

She figuratively snapped her fingers at fate.

A dying man! She could afford to defy him! But as she sat amid her ribbons and feathers and looked up at Patricia's set face, she saw there could be no evasion or denial here—nothing but—

Miriam paused and caught her breath. For one instant her eyes had a frightened look; and then she laughed a laugh full of significance.

(To be continued.)

THE onion first came from India, and was an object of worship with the Egyptians 2,000 years before the Christian era.

THOSE who have given any particular attention to the study of botanical oddities know that the Brazilian flower known as the "running antelope" is so called because its white petals have a series of well-defined dark-coloured lines and dots, in which the imagination can readily trace the form of an antelope, with its limbs outstretched and head thrown back, seemingly fleeing for its life. In the "caricature plant" one species has the imitative form on the petals, and another has it outlined in the ribs and shading of the leaves. This last-mentioned curiosity bears a remarkably well-executed likeness of the Duke of Wellington, and on that account has been named "Arthur and His Nose."



"OH, YOU MUST KISS ME! YOU SHALL KISS ME!" HEBE SOBBED, HELPLESSLY.

THE SECRETS AND SHADOWS OF CASTLEGRANGE.

CHAPTER XIX.

No more pleasant rambles with Selina Ann in the forest; no more delightful walks and drives with my gentle lame kinsman Julian!

The carriage was at the door in the courtyard; my luggage—with the addition of a huge hamper packed full of good things—had gone on to the station in a cart.

I could have sat on the brim of the old still fountain and wept many and bitter tears; but I was afraid Mr. Tressillian would think me childish, and that I ought to know better at my age.

To Selina Ann and Mrs. Bell I had said good-bye in the housekeeper's sitting-room; whilst Mrs. Vasper had come to the door of my room almost at the last moment, and just as I was wondering whether I should see her at all before I went, and said as we met upon the threshold,—

"I bear no malice; for after all, you are only a child. It is better to part as friends, Hebe Fairburn; is it not? The sun's going down upon our wrath is always an awful thought—particularly when, in this sad, uncertain life on earth, there is ever the possibility of its nevermore rising upon it."

Perplexed as to what reply I should make to this somewhat ambiguous speech, I answered merely,—

"Yes."

"Here, by the way, is a little prayer-book I have found," she continued. "It once belonged to your mother; so I thought you might like to possess it, and take it away with you to school."

I felt grateful and kindly disposed towards her for the first time.

"Thank you," I answered directly then; "I should."

She gave me the faded little volume in her

hand, which was bound in purple velvet and had a filigree gilt clasp to it, and said coldly—

"Her maiden name—'Doreen Tressillian'—in her own handwriting, you will find inside. Good-bye." And turned to go as she spoke.

"Goodbye. And once more, thank you very much. I shall value my mother's little book more than I can say. And—and, Mrs. Vasper," I said falteringly, "I—I am afraid—"

I stopped; and she halted too, looking at me over her shoulder. "Yes?"

"I was going to say, that—that I am afraid, after all, I have sometimes been rude and rebellious—rude to you, I mean. If you still think so I—I now beg your pardon, and hope that you will forgive me."

Her eyelids flickered; a faint, dull colour appeared for an instant or two in her white-brown cheeks, denoting satisfaction, I knew.

"That is well and seemly of you, Hebe," said Mrs. Vasper. "I am glad to hear the confession, even though it comes late. Farewell, child; and may you be happy."

And so saying, she moved away from me down the corridor, never once looking back; and I saw her no more until my school-life was ended.

Then I went down, slowly and heavily enough, to Mr. Tressillian, who was waiting for me in the barons' hall; and with him entered the Castlegrange carriage and drove to the Waybridge station.

Down-hearted and utterly wretched as I felt, I nevertheless resolved that I would not give way if I could anyhow possibly bear up; at all events, so long as I was in the company of my kinsman Julian; for I could discern that his depression of the morning was not yet gone, and tears and lamentations on my part would certainly in no wise tend to alleviate it.

He tried to talk to me in blithe and hopeful tones; and I tried hard to respond in like humour. But both his efforts and mine were doleful failures; and I fancy that we were both of us conscious, too, that a make-believe gaiety was even worse than an actual and acknowledged gloom.

It was ten minutes to six in the evening when we steamed into Bath station. Madame Adolphe had written to Mr. Tressillian that she should expect me in time for tea.

We drove in an open fly at once to Spa Gardens; which locality, I discovered, was a terrace of substantial tall white houses standing in the pleasantest and very best part of the town.

At No. 5 we were shown immediately into a large and handsome drawing-room of its kind, all chilly white and gold and wan sage-green, and Madame herself was quick to enter and welcome us warmly with both hands held out.

She was an upright, an active, a brisk-mannered woman, about as old perhaps as Mrs. Joyce; well-preserved, as the phrase goes, and decidedly interesting at first glance. She was a woman who thoroughly comprehended the work in life she had appointed herself to perform—and in it succeeded accordingly.

Madame Adolphe and Mr. Tressillian, I noticed, met as old friends, and they talked together apart for a while in low tones and in French; Julian speaking in a slow and weary way, Madame with animation and evidently to the point.

Presently she said in English, with a bright nod,—

"You will excuse me for a moment, I know. I have a word to say to the school-room maid," and left the room with the agile light step of a healthy girl of sixteen.

Julian and I were alone; and he said then, hurriedly,—

"We had better say good-bye now, Hebe. I have to catch my train back to Waybridge, remember."

I could not speak. My sham valour was all gone—dead outright.

"Come, say good-bye, dear," said he, in a kind low tone.

"I have had to say so many good-byes lately, it seems to me—so many!" I somehow managed to answer. "But—but this is the—the worst of all!"

He lifted my little limp hand and held it between his own two very tenderly.

"You will be a child no longer—almost grown into a woman!—when we next meet, should Heaven spare us both," he said gravely. "Work hard, Hebe, won't you? and so please Madame Adolphe and—me."

"Oh, I will try!" I said forlornly.

Julian drew me towards him.

"Well, Heaven bless you, dear! I—I don't think there is anything else to be said."

And, at parting now, he was about to kiss me on the forehead, as he had done once—only once—before; but he seemed suddenly to hesitate, to change his mind; and as suddenly my instinct told me that he had remembered that first night at Les Cottage, when he had kissed me in greeting because I was so like my mother Doreen, and I had shrunk from the caresses in something like sheer undisguised terror at the little lame dwarfish man who they told me—though I could hardly believe them then—was Julian Tressillian, my kinsman of Castlegrange!

Now however, of my own accord, I flung my arms around his neck, and pressed my head against his face and beard.

"Oh, you must kiss me! You shall kiss me," I sobbed helplessly, "before you go!"

And I clung to him with passionate strength, and told him that I loved him very much, and begged him wildly to take me back with him to Castlegrange—alone, without him, I could not stay with Madame Adolphe!

But at that instant Madame Adolphe herself returned to us, and cried cheerfully,—

"Come, come! This will never do! Not stay with me! Why not, pray? I came to say that tea is waiting—What, you really must go, Mr. Tressillian; and so soon! I am sorry . . . Oh, do not fear; she will be better presently! Some of my girls have already come back to me, and amongst us all we will soon cheer her up . . ."

I heard the closing of the hall-door. He was gone.

CHAPTER XX.

"HEBE, you're a duck—a regular duck!" Felicia Luck exclaimed, in her whimsical, extravagant way.

In emotional moments, or at times of unusual excitement, she would call me the drollest of impossible things, yet always meant in endearing fashion; and she said too, in a general way, that I was precisely one of those rare people in the world whom everybody, directly either he or she knew me, must infallibly and inevitably incline to address as "dear"—because they couldn't help themselves! Oh, too imaginative and ridiculous Felicia!

"A beautiful generous red-haired duck!" averred she.

"Please do not be so absurd," I reproved, smiling and returning her embrace—hers in reality was a hug—all the same. "When will you learn to be staid and sensible, Felicia?"

"Never I hope—in the way you mean," cried she; "at least, not for the next fifty years. My intention is always to keep young, you see; for nobody need grow old, I maintain, if he makes up his mind that he won't—and who, I should like to know, ever expects young folk to be staid and sensible? No wise man, Hebe, my dearest; I am old enough to know that."

"Well, I am glad that you like the idea, Felicia, of coming with me to Castlegrange," I remarked. "It will indeed be delightful for me to have you there. Nothing in the world could be nicer."

"Like the idea! I am enraptured with the notion," she said. "I think it is awfully good of your guardian, or whatever he really is, to invite me—poor me!—and so, I shall tell him myself when we meet. The invitation is thankfully accepted, be sure of that, for it has, as it were, shed the loveliest possible rose-colour upon the future of the lone lorn orphan Felicia Luck, and revealed or suggested to her a vista of infinite possibilities which, with tact, care, and due *finesse*, may in time take practical shape and surprise you all immensely, darling!"

"Oh, Felicia, what do you mean?" I asked,

half-inclined to believe that she was speaking seriously.

There were times indeed when it was hard to tell whether she was in jest or in earnest.

"I wish you were not so fond of talking in riddles," I added.

Felicia immediately propounded another enigma. But this time the character of it was so flagrant and unveiled that the greatest dullard on earth could not well have remained in the dark.

"How," said Felicia deliberately, folding her arms and regarding me unwinkingly—"how, Hebe darling, would you like to see me some fine day your guardian-ess and the châteline of Castlegrange?"

"You are too ridiculous, Felicia," I answered quickly then; genuinely annoyed at what seemed to me a flippancy so hateful that it touched the profane.

"I cannot see it—honestly I can't," she rejoined unabashed. "What in the world is to become of me? I must do something for myself—now—the best I can. A girl situated like me should have her wits about her: if 'success' is to be written on her tombstone. From what I gather, he is little and lame; scarcely up to my elbow; and by this time well on in his forties—no matter! Were he as hideous as Quilp, or a second Quasimodo, I'd not demur, would he only condescend to smile on me. I've no beauty—alas! I know it—and in a black gown unfortunately I look plainer than ever. Only my wits to help me! Nevertheless, since I am actually invited to the Palace of the Prince—oh, rare opportunity!—prepare then to see me dodge triumphantly the awful governess-destiny looming ahead of me, and to make my best bow to an envious world instead as Mrs. Julian Tressillian of Castlegrange. Why not? Remember Copetua and the Beggar Maid. Stranger things happen every day."

"Felicia, you are distinctly odious," I said coldly; and turning from her, walked away in marked displeasure to another part of the garden.

But she skipped after me at once; slipped her arm through my unwilling one; kissed my cheek; and would not be shaken off.

"Ducky pet," she said gaily, "I was only in fun. Cannot you enter into the spirit of my poor little joke, and forgive me?"

"Such jokes are in questionable taste—are positively indecent, Felicia, I think," I said, severely. "No one would be more disgusted than Mr. Tressillian himself, could he hear you now—"

"Of course," she interrupted; "I know that. Why imagine impossible things, Hebe! Trust me, I feel far too grateful to Mr. Tressillian," she said frankly, "ever to be fool enough to disgust him to his face. In me he shall see nothing but my very best behaviour, I promise you; no expression, no word not strictly academical falling from my lips shall ever offend his fastidious ear. No! In Felicia Luck he shall behold naught but the pattern poor orphan—modest, resigned, self-effacing, and full of a beautiful Christian humility; a picture that cannot fail to touch your paragon, I'm sure!"

It was not possible at any time to be angry with Felicia for long; at any rate, it was not possible for those who cared for her as I did. So in the next minute we were friends again; and together arm-in-arm we strolled round Madame's little green high-walled garden at the back of the house, with its tangled wilderness of southernwood and cabbage-roses, and its gnarled old spreading mulberry trees lavish of cool shade—deep in animated converse of our near going to Castlegrange.

I had been at Bath with Madame Adolphe for nearly three years before Felicia Luck arrived there to join the exclusive establishment at No. 5 Spa Gardens.

Somehow until Felicia came I had made no intimate, no bosom friend of any one of Madame's other pupils; though they all in their turn professed to "adore" me. I don't know why, unless it was because I had every week more pocket-money of my own than that of all the rest of them put together; and because, perhaps, also, I

appeared to be chief favourite in all things with Madame Adolphe herself.

We were only eight girls in all before Felicia appeared upon the scene—she made nine; and, in Felicia Luck's own phraseology, we "took to" each other at once.

Since our fast growing mutual liking had ripened into a staunch affection—something, I venture to assert, that was better and stronger, in every wise more durable, than the ordinary school-girl friendship jeered as a rule by the world—Felicia and I had had no secrets from each other. She knew the story of my life; I knew the story of hers. And if mine might be justly accounted a life-history somewhat singular in its bearings and out of the common run, hers, surely, from every point of view, was infinitely more extraordinary!

To a great extent, however, the lines of our birth and being were, as it were, parallel lines. Neither of us could remember either father or mother; neither of us possessed either brother or sister; each of us had been reared from infancy to childhood by kind yet alien hands.

Julian Tressillian alone, so far as I knew, represented my kindred in this world—Felicia, on the other hand, could boast no kinsfolk at all. It was these corresponding circumstances in our separate lives, I believe, more than anything else, which made us the close friends we were; at all events, the discovery of them had done much towards cementing, confirming, the real sympathy and love which existed between Felicia and me.

I well remember one night in the bed-room which Madame Adolphe, since we wished it, had kindly consented that we might share—after I had been telling Felicia a great deal about myself; my life and my friends at Thorpe; my knowledge, my experience, such as they were, of Castlegrange, its inmates, its shadows, its mysteries—I well remember, I say, how Felicia startled me by calling out from her bed on the other side of the room,—

"Ah, well, if you tried your hardest until Doomsday, you would never guess who or rather what I am, my dear!"

"But I know, don't I?" I said wonderingly. "You have told me, Felicia, before."

"I have told you only what Miss Tabitha Graham herself—bless her noble old heart!—says, mind you! You have never heard the truth," was Felicia's strange reply—"never yet, Hebe, in all its appalling nakedness," she added sadly.

"Are not you really, then, the niece of the Honourable Miss Graham, of the Boltons, South Kensington—isn't it?" I said, in deeper wonderment than ever.

"I repeat, that is what Miss Graham herself has been pleased to give out to the world at large—her generous old heart well knowing that a falsehood of the kind, rather than the actual truth, would be to my advantage in life. But all her relations—who secretly hate me for an interloper; ha! ha!—of course know better; only it suits them to bow to and humour the caprices of an elderly rich relative, whom they are mortally afraid of offending, and whose money they are all impatiently waiting to finger—S-sh! Me-thought I heard a stealthy tread outside. Perhaps Madame Adolphe is listening at the key-hole."

"Madame Adolphe is no Madame Beek," I said stoutly. "It may be Fraulein or Mademoiselle; but neither of them knows English sufficiently well to understand what you are saying. Oh, Felicia, do go on! You have made me dreadfully curious to hear more."

"Ah me!" sighed Felicia heavily; but as to whether that sigh were mock or real I was in doubt. I often was in doubt where Felicia's freaks and vagaries were concerned. "Ah me!" said she, "perhaps when you hear *more* you won't care for me any more. Oh, Hebe pet, is that possible, do you think?"

"I am not mean," I said quietly. "You should know me better. It is for yourself, Felicia, that I love you; not for what you may be. You might be a—a butcher's daughter; but it would make no difference."

"Really and truly!" said she earnestly—"on your honour, Hebe!"

"Really and truly; on my honour, Felicia," answered I.

Felicia sat up in bed; and said mournfully in the dark,—

"It is worse than that; 'the butcher's daughter' idea, I mean."

"A chimney-sweep's then," I suggested, laughing.

"Would that it were even so!" sighed she again—"for anybody's daughter would be more satisfactory than nobody's daughter. And that, in reality, is what I am—a waif, a stray, an ownerless brat; a starved foundling saved from the parish workhouse by the humanity, the angel goodness, of the christian gentlewoman who calls herself my aunt."

I was intensely interested and amazed, and sat up in bed too; but as it happened to be a very gloomy autumn night, I could not see anything of Felicia. I could hear her voice—nothing more. I ejaculated softly,—

"Oh, Felicia dearest!" and that was all.

"Such friends as ourselves should have no secrets one from the other," she said. "I had made up my mind that you should hear the truth concerning myself—the naked, simple truth—and now it's out. You have kept nothing back from me; and I, now, Hebe sweet, have nothing hidden from you. Would you like to hear the story? It is by no means a long one."

"Indeed I should, Felicia."

Then in as few words as possible she told it. When she ended, she said—"And did it never strike you, Hebe, that the name I am called by is a rather fantastic one, to say the least of it?"

"No—o, darling; I don't think so," I answered, yet pondering the question a little now. "I have always thought it a very pretty name, I'm certain, if I have thought about it at all."

I was out of bed by this time, and sitting in the darkness by Felicia's tumbled pillows. I had crept out of my own bed and groped my way over to hers, in order to kiss her and caress her and to assure her repeatedly that the story she had just told me would never "make any difference"—never; why should it? It was a misfortune, not a fault. She could not help it. And her romantic secret; I promised her solemnly, should ever thenceforward be as safe in my keeping as if it had never been revealed to me that night.

"Yes, my own dear, that is exactly how it happened," said Felicia cheerfully. "Miss Graham, you see, said that it was indeed a most 'felicitous' chance—a piece of amazing good 'luck' for me—that my unnatural parent or parents, whoever they are or were (for Heaven alone knows whether they are now living or dead; and surely 'tis no wonder if I don't much care myself which way it is) had seen fit to deposit me, a helpless little fortnight-old bundle, upon her doorsteps, and not elsewhere upon the inhospitable doorsteps of some other maiden lady less well-off and benevolent than herself."

Some big hungry prowling dog, too, she has often said, might easily have gobbled me up for breakfast, before the housemaid had gone out to wash the steps; or some huge authoritative policeman have carried me off on his own responsibility to the nearest union, and nobody been any the wiser! And so for a name that I, then nameless, might very well take and keep for my own, my adopter and benefactress hit upon the happy combination of "Felicia Luck."

CHAPTER XXI.

It is not my intention here to linger over the memories of the time which I spent under the custodianship of Madame Adolphe. A school-girl in her teens is one of the most haplessly uninteresting objects this earth can show; she is neither child nor woman, and is miserably conscious of the fact into the bargain. The reminiscences of such a "singular two-legged animal," no matter how sincerely recorded, are invariably and insufferably irksome, and as invariably skipped by the discerning eye.

List, then, a brief sketch, a compendium of

those few years passed in scholastic restraint and experience at Bath, suffice.

For nearly six years was I a pupil of Madame Adolphe, at that pleasant house of hers in Spa Gardens—or rather, to be accurate, a pupil of the excellent governesses and masters employed thereat by Madame. For although amply qualified to do so, she took but slight part herself in class-room matters.

The well-managed house was her especial care. When a master, however, whether Englishman or foreigner, gave a lesson of any description, Madame Adolphe in *propria persona* was always present with her work-basket. It was not that she in any wise mistrusted her accomplished lynx-eyed middle-aged governesses; it was simply that she had a completer trust in herself, and chose on occasion to rely upon her own observation rather than upon that of others.

She was in no one characteristic the least bit in the world like the stiff, severe, grim-faced bogey of a school-mistress that story-tellers are so fond of depicting in their books. On the contrary, she was a brisk, clever, and withal most lovable soul, at times a trifle quick perhaps in temper, but never hard in discipline or unjust; and she has remained a valued friend of mine, I am proud to say, through life.

We wrote as many letters as we pleased unquestioned; and received unchallenged just as many as ever our friends were minded to write to us in return.

"My pupils are all of them high-minded young gentlemen," Madame would say complacently, in a general, comprehensive sort of way, "and would not deceive me; I know. If I ever ceased to respect them, I should immediately cease to love them; and that, I think, would be worse than all."

I had been happy and contented at No. 5 Spa Gardens even before the arrival there of Felicia Luck, working conscientiously and doing my very best to improve as I had promised Mr. Tressillian that I would; but when Felicia joined us, and I found in her at last my *fidus Achates*, things for me, of course, became brighter and pleasanter than ever.

Is life worth living? is the cynical question so often heard on all sides nowadays. It seems to me that there is but one true answer to it. With friendship and love—yes! Without them—no!

Felicia's age was nearly the same as my own; though the sad singularity of her antecedents of course rendered it impossible to fix the date of her birth to a day. She was a few months my senior; perhaps, but no more.

As she was ever ready to admit, Nature had not made her beautiful, though the freakish dame had seen fit to give her a passable figure; but her face when she spoke, which was often, was an expressive, a most animated one, and a positive pleasure to look upon when she smiled. Her complexion was swarthy; her rather coarse black hair had upon it here and there a sort of rusty, bronzy glint in the sunlight; her teeth were as white and even as a young Jamaica vigner's; and there was a world of fun and humour in her lively sloe-black eyes.

Madame's library, which with certain restrictions was also ours, was an admirably diversified collection of books; novels of her own wise selection abounding upon the shelves. Felicia and I read the same romances, and criticized the various characters in them afterwards. We always walked together, studied together, and, as I have previously stated, at night occupied the same sleeping-chamber.

Absolute control, so long as I should remain in her charge, had Madame Adolphe over me and my actions—such had been the desire of Julian Tressillian before his departure for distant lands; therefore it was for her to determine, for her to consent, in what manner, in what direction, my holidays should be spent, when those welcome half-yearly periods of breaking-up and dispersion came round.

The short Easter recess, it being her wish, I generally passed quietly with Madame herself in Bath; nevertheless, very enjoyably did she contrive to make the time go for me.

Twice I had spent Christmas with Felicia and

her "Aunt Tabby," the Honourable Miss Graham—an eccentric but a delightfully frolicsome and amusing old spinster—in London; three or four times I had gone to my beloved old friend Mrs. Joyce, at her cosy, old-world-looking and creeper-covered cottage at Blackheath. And on more than one occasion a good-natured, indolent, sleepy sort of girl, I remember, named Helen Macleod, had taken me home with her to her parents' house—a hoary picturesque old castle in the north, which somehow set one thinking of the border ballads and the days of Chevy Chase.

And so the not unhappy years of school life, work-time and play-time, went by.

Never did Felicia return from London without bringing to me a lovely present from a West-end shop, the joint gift, she used to explain soberly, of herself and her Aunt Tabitha. Very glad used I to feel then that I was luckily rich enough not to allow the generosity to remain all on one side; for if it is more blessed to give than to receive, it is certainly pleasanter also.

Often, with bated breath, did we speak together of the cloud upon her life, and wonder whether the dark mystery of it would ever be elucidated.

"Oh, I do hope," she would say quaintly, "that I am not anything quite too unforgivably low; though I confess that my secret fears sometimes point to the very worst! No really nice respectable infants—are they!—are ever found by housemaids upon people's doorsteps at half-past seven o'clock on a foggy winter morning? Such outrageous things happen, I believe, only to the very dregs of humanity. Alas, poor me!"

And then she would fall to speculating idly as to what Madame Adolphe would probably do and say if by some evil mishap or other she were ever to get an inkling of the dreadful truth.

"You see, Hebe," Felicia reflected, "you are all of you—well, shall I say it? Yes, I will!—you are all of you such 'swells' here!—the proud daughters of the aristocracy of the land; of 'dukes, markises, and hearls.' It would be a terrific shock to Madame and the rest—good gracious! it would make them all sit up with a vengeance—should they ever discover that there was a veritable black sheep in the midst of their exclusive and expensive fold; that a fellow-pupil of theirs was a waif of the London streets, just that and no more—a child of the gutter, an atom of lost creation, a stray of humanity owned by nobody, but adopted, reared, and educated regardless of cost by one who is unquestionably the most erratic but at the same time best-hearted spinster Samaritan at this moment dwelling out of Samaria."

I knew not how to answer Felicia when she talked in this extravagant vein. I could only shake my head and sigh apprehensively.

Madame Adolphe was a proud woman, high minded, truthful, and consistently just at all times. She never pardoned deception, we knew. I feared in my heart that there was little doubt indeed as to what course Madame Adolphe would feel it her bounden duty to pursue, supposing that the unhappy buried secret of Felicia's birth should ever by any accident struggle upward to the light!

Felicia had been a good deal abroad, young as she was, before her coming to the strictly select establishment in Spa Gardens. She had been placed for a year by Miss Graham in a Moravian Convent; she had been at school in Hanover; and at school in Paris—besides travelling about here, there, and everywhere with her benefactress during the holidays, or when she was not at school at all.

The result of this irregular mode of education and nomadic experience was that Felicia Luck could chatter some three or four foreign languages with the same facility and raciness with which she chattered her own.

Indeed there had been a time when her French and German, at any rate in writing them, were noticeably superior to her mother-tongue. It was in order to remedy this defect that the Honourable Miss Graham had sent her "nieces" to the irreproachable academy of Madame Adolphe.

Mr. Tressillian wrote to me, perhaps, about every month; sometimes oftener; and as Felicia was intimately acquainted with many an out-of-the-way corner of Europe mentioned in my kins-

man's letters, I was in the habit of showing them to her, reading them with her, and getting her to tell me all she could remember of these, to me, quite unknown and never-before-heard-of places which she had visited with Miss Graham as a child.

But latterly Julian Tressillian had wandered still farther afield, and had left the continent of Europe altogether. For the past year or so his letters had come to me from the East—from Egypt, Syria, and the Holy Land.

"What charming, sensible letters this wandering guardian of yours writes," exclaimed Felicia once, in honest admiration of an epistle somewhat longer than usual, in which graphic terse description of strange scenes and people was quaintly blent with tender homely advice all for my own good. "I can readily conceive that he must be nice; in fact, he couldn't well be otherwise. Oh, what a pity it is that he should be little and deformed!"

"Not exactly deformed, Felicia dear—don't say so!" I objected in a hurt tone. "I never told you that."

"Did you not? I thought you did. Well, whatever he be, it is distinctly clear to me, Hebe, that he is worth a dozen of that other male correspondent of yours—young Bertie what's-his-name of the corn-coloured locks. From his letters, I judge," said Felicia, with disdainful half-closed eyes and tip-tilted nose in air "that the youth is conceited and wants taking down a peg."

"Felicia, you are too bad, slandering one's absent friends in that manner! You know nothing about them, really!" I exclaimed, partly offended, partly amused. "Bertie Wilford conceited! He used not to be so, I do assure you. Why, he is only a light-hearted boy!"

"I guess," said Felicia, assuming an odious American twang which she had picked up parrot-like in her travels with her Aunt Tabby—"I guess that young man wouldn't much relish being called 'only a light-hearted boy' now."

"He never could be anything else if he tried," I said confidently, forgetting that Bertie's age at this time must be something near or over three-and-twenty.

"Umph!" said Felicia Luck.

(To be continued.)

THE SQUIRE'S SON.

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CHAPTER XXV.

CARNARVON HOUSE was one blaze of light. The windows were like so many sides to a lantern when Reginald Dartmouth entered the first reception-room.

Then he passed through the arched entrance, draped with lace and hangings of crimson and gold, into the brilliantly lighted saloon.

It was crowded, and Reginald Dartmouth saw that the crowd consisted of the best and choicest of the Upper Ten.

Reginald Dartmouth was a well-known man, and nods and becks and wreathed smiles welcomed his tall, lithe figure as he made his way to the Countess, who turned and held out her hand.

"It is good of you," she murmured, musically. "I had given you up. Sir Charles assured me that you were detained. I felt disappointed, for I like to count upon my friends."

Reginald Dartmouth inclined his head.

"The Countess Vitzarelli may always with true assurance count on me as her most devoted slave."

After a little more of such complimentary badinage, he escorted the Countess to a spot where two people were fighting hard at a game of chess.

Leaving her at the table, where she was immediately surrounded by an eager crowd of courtiers, Reginald Dartmouth went in search of Sir Charles Anderson.

He found him seated in a recess talking with

a little white-haired old gentleman with a decided Roman cast of face and two restless grey eyes that flashed here, there, and everywhere, settling with a questioning gaze upon the captain's face.

"Hullo!" said Sir Charles, "here you are at last. I gave you up. Count, allow me to introduce you. Captain Dartmouth, Count Vitzarelli," etc.

Reginald Dartmouth scanned the wrinkled face beneath his brows—there was no resemblance, not the slightest, to the beautiful Countess. Could he be her father?

They got into conversation: the old Count was a Republican and heart and soul sold to his "Italia."

He commenced talking Roman politics immediately, and Captain Dartmouth, much to Sir Charles's astonishment, listened attentively and discussed the question in all its details.

The young baronet, lounging against one of the carved pillars of the recess, was filled with wonder, and with a sigh concluded that his friend Captain Reginald Dartmouth was one of those individuals no fellow could understand.

It was not till the Count, delighted with Reginald's eloquence, had moved to speak to another guest, that Sir Charles could throw himself down upon the seat with a comical groan.

"Heavens, Dartmouth, you are as good as a play. One continual surprise. By Jove, you talked like an Italian politician. Now I want you to come and have a hand at *carté*; Dalton and some of the other fellows are at it in one of the card-rooms."

"I am with you with all my heart," said the captain, and arm in arm the two made their way to a small card-room, tapestried with purple velvet and furnished in *buhl* and *ormolu*.

It was well into the small hours before they parted. The captain had had bad luck, and it was with a wearied and bored look that he rose, and, still accompanied by Sir Charles, returned to the principal saloon.

It was nearly empty, only half a dozen or so chatting in corners, and adding to the huge look of the place by the insignificance of their number.

As the friends were descending the stairs Sir Charles pulled up short.

"By Jove, Dartmouth," he exclaimed, looking annoyed, "I forgot to give Dalton that I O U. Look here, you go on, and I'll run back and find him. Confoundedly stupid of me. I will not be a minute. Meet you at the other door."

And he moved away as he spoke.

He had gone before Reginald Dartmouth could remind him that he was a stranger to the place, and did not know where to find the other door.

"It would have saved your friends an immensity of trouble, Sir Charles Anderson, if your fate had been gracious enough to give you brains," muttered Reginald Dartmouth. "Which door does the idiot mean? Had I not asked him to supper I might leave him to disentangle the knot his stupidity has tied, but as it is I suppose I must go back."

And with a frown he retraced his steps.

The large saloon was empty. Not even a footman was in sight, and he was passing through it in the direction of the door at the farther end when the glimmer of a satin dress at one of the windows of the balcony caught his attention.

He stopped, and, out of curiosity, walked towards the window.

Before he had reached it he saw that the dress belonged to the Countess Vitzarelli, and that that lady herself was leaning on the balcony with her hands clasped, and her face turned towards the sky.

At that moment, as he stood watching her, she turned slightly, but sufficiently for him to see her face distinctly.

He started with astonishment.

It was white, anxious, wistful, and filled with pain or unsatisfied longing, and—yes, there could be no doubt of it—the pale cheeks were dotted with tears.

He drew back behind the curtain, and, waiting long enough only to hear a deep, long-drawn sigh and these words,—

"How long? how long!" he walked from the saloon.

"Soh!" he muttered, as he stepped into his private cab. "Madame the countess has a secret and a mystery!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE Squire had been resting in his grave only a month, but a great change had been wrought at the Dale.

Some astonishment had been felt and expressed by the country folks at the contents of the last will, and its mysterious and sudden manufacture, together with the disappearance of Hugh and Grace Darrell, had been much gossiped about.

It was astonishing, people said, that Squire Darrell should so far have forgotten what he owed the unfortunate young man and woman who had both been taught to look upon the Dale as their future inheritance, and at the last moment, by a short, concise, and barely legal will should have left his vast property to Captain Dartmouth, who, though his nephew, had paid him no attention until the last few months of the old man's life.

Captain Reginald Dartmouth, triumphant and victorious, cared nothing for the gossip.

He was secure—perfectly. If there existed any ground for a legal quibble there was no one, Hugh and Grace having disappeared, to come forward and urge it.

Captain Reginald Dartmouth was possessor of the Dale estates and twenty thousand a year.

It was a large sum, far larger than he had expected to receive—far larger than he could understand the Squire's possessing until Mr. Reeves explained that for thirty years the sun of prosperity had never set upon the Dale, and that the Squire, besides living very far within his income, had been fortunate with every speculation he had launched into.

For the present Captain Dartmouth contented himself with leaving his card in return for those of the Brandons and Wheatleys, but made a personal visit to Miss Goodman.

But when he drove over in his deep, but very becoming mourning, he was met with the message that,—

"Miss Rebecca was too unwell to see visitors." This puzzled him.

He could not get at the reason of it. Granted that Miss Goodman feared and disliked him, the problem was—why?

He had done nothing—at least, that she or any one else could know of—to lose her esteem.

He had always tried to win her over, feeling that she was too wealthy and powerful, and that the Warren was too near to the Dale, to render the chance of her being useful to him a remote one.

He went up to town and took a house near the Park. A grand mansion, but not good enough for him.

So he called in two of the principal decorators and upholsterers in London, and retained one to make the Park lane house fit for him, while the other was to repair to the Dale with an army of workmen and thoroughly renovate, decorate and furnish the old place.

For a month, while the lawyers were at work settling the late Squire's affairs, Captain Dartmouth remained quiet, drawing plans for his two residences, purchasing carriages and horses, and in other and various ways preparing for the life of luxury he meant to live.

The month passed, and while looking round for some other excuse for expenditure he met and had the conversation with Sir Charles Anderson that has been recorded.

From the park he had gone—still the same cold and seemingly purposeless man—to the Countess Vitzarelli's.

From there he had reached home most utterly changed.

A touch of the magic wand had awakened him to the consciousness that his heart still lived, and, more, that it throbbed with a new hope and a new purpose.

He had thought it dead—dead and buried with

the too faithful Bella, but he discovered that it had sprung from the ashes, and that it burnt with a fiercer and more intense fire than before.

As he stood before the mirror and regarded the placid, almost unnaturally calm face reflected there he murmured, as a man who hides nothing from himself, who plays at no hide and seek with his own conscience,—

"I love Lucille, Countess Vitzarelli—I, who thought to love no more! And why? Who shall say? perhaps because—because—there is the shadow of a likeness in her face and form to her who died for love of me. Perhaps because I have seen by chance behind the mask of peace and prosperity she wears so well. Perhaps because I see a fitting alibi to link with mine. For all these reasons, perchance. But—reason or none 'tis the same—I, Reginald Dartmouth, love her."

And for Reginald Dartmouth to say he loved was to say that he meant to woo, and, by fair means or foul, win.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"AND so you think that there is something more than appears on the surface in the Vitzarellis?"

The speaker was Reginald Dartmouth, lounging on a fauteuil in the private ball-room of the Duke of Tetherton.

The person to whom the question was addressed was a foreign diplomat, an astute man of the world, behind the political scenes of every court in Europe, and possessing a key to the most intricate mazes of diplomatic life.

The tone of the question was careless, almost indifferent, touched only with a slight appearance of interest and amused curiosity—nothing more.

Sir Bardolph smiled the smile that had puzzled many a crowned head.

"As to madame the Countess and the white-haired Elrado, their game—their game is broken in two parts. One, the man's, is Italy, the other the Countess's, is—I know not what. It may be Italy, for she is an Italian—at least by repute; but see, she is coming this way."

The Countess, superb with her Southern beauty and princely diamonds, glided towards them.

As Reginald rose and took her proffered hand she smiled and murmured a few words of greeting.

Reginald Dartmouth, while replying with reverential respect, saw with a glance of his quick eyes that Sir Bardolph had placed one finger upon his heart as he rose and kept it there for a moment, indeed until he had elicited the signal of response from the Countess, who with a peculiar smile, full of meaning and significance, pressed her small taper finger to her side and glided on.

Sir Bardolph sank into his seat with a quiet smile of triumph.

Reginald Dartmouth stroked his moustache thoughtfully.

"You observed?" said Sir Bardolph.

Reginald Dartmouth inclined his head.

"I saw you place your forefinger against your heart, and fancied that the Countess Vitzarelli answered the gesture."

"It was no fancy," replied Sir Bardolph. "That is the secret sign—or at least one of them—whereby we know each other."

"You then are of the band?" queried the captain.

"I am a member, or at least am cognisant of nearly all the secret societies of Europe," retorted Sir Bardolph.

"And, pardon me, but would not this disclosure you have just made to me of the sign be considered as savour of treason?"

Sir Bardolph shook his head.

"I am a favoured individual," he said; "I am allowed a very wide margin. They know that I could quash them all, Communists, Carlists, Reds, one and all, and so they let me be. Besides," and he rose with a repetition of the diplomatic smile, "it is scarcely a revelation—'tis but at best a premature initiation, for if I mistake not Captain Dart-

mouth will soon be enrolled amongst the Vitzarelli followers."

Reginald Dartmouth frowned and shot a glance of anger after the languid, self-possessed figure. He disliked being read more than most men, but he knew his man too well to resent it. Few secrets were such to Sir Bardolph.

Reginald Dartmouth sat and pondered a little while, then rose and walked to one of the saloons where he had little difficulty in finding the Count, whose white head was seen shining amidst a small group of Italians and Englishmen conversing at one of the deep windows.

As Reginald sauntered towards them the eagle eyes of the old Italian caught sight of him, and a quick smile of welcome and recognition passed over his intellectual face.

He left the group as Reginald Dartmouth came towards it, and linking his arm through his said,—

"Ah, captain, I have been looking for you everywhere. This place is like a wilderness; our palaces are nothing to it, though they have the name for hugeness. Ah, you English are the grand people in everything."

Captain Dartmouth smiled.

"And yet we have not eclipsed the fame of your countrymen, my lord. Enough is still left of ancient Rome to remind us of our littleness."

"Ah! Rome!" sighed the Count, shooting a sharp glance of scrutiny at the impassable face above him. "Ah, Rome! Poor Rome! Captain Dartmouth, to hear that name is to feel the opening of a wound. Rome! you touch a chord when you speak it, a chord that is as fresh and as sharp within this old heart as when it first rang out to the grand name. Italy! Rome! There are hundreds—nay thousands of Italians ready to die for the mere names."

Reginald Dartmouth looked interested.

"And not only Italians, my lord," he answered, throwing a fire into his low voice that thrilled the heart of the old Italian, "but Englishmen. Rome belongs to all the world in one sense, and when the cry for liberty goes up more than the Italians will help to swell the chorus."

The old Count's face flushed, and with a trembling hand he led, almost dragged his companion aside.

"Do I blunder, Captain Dartmouth—do I misunderstand the full purport of your words—noble words!—or do you imply that you are ready to become one of us?"

His eager, excited voice was hushed and cautious, his dark, flashing eyes were fixed upon the calm, calculating ones of Reginald.

Before he could reply the Countess Vitzarelli passed behind one of the pillars, leaning on the arm of the duke.

Reginald Dartmouth flushed again as he saw the beautiful face, and in almost as eager a voice said,—

"Let me know more, Count, or rather tell me in a word if you are fighting for Italy and freedom, and—I am with you."

The Count grasped his hand.

"We are. What else could we be for? Noble captain! you have filled me with fresh hope. With such as you at our side we cannot fail."

Reginald Dartmouth was about to speak, but the Count ran on rapidly.

"To-night we meet at the usual rendezvous. It is a select assemblage of the heads and chiefs. You will honour us by making one of the council! Lucille—goes from here to the council-chamber. May I reckon on your accompanying her?"

Reginald Dartmouth's eyes glittered.

"You may, Count," he said simply. He wished the Italian to think him a lover of Italy (not the Countess), and so was careful to make no show of warmth at the mention of her name.

"Then I will find and tell the Countess," said the Count, grasping Reginald Dartmouth's hand again. "Wait for her here in the ante-chamber if we do not meet again."

And with a fervent gratitude the conspirator turned away.

Reginald Dartmouth looked after him for a moment and then turned away with a quiet smile.

"Soh," he muttered, "I am to be a member of the council of Vitzarelli conspirators! Well, I

would risk greater things than that for the beautiful Lucille."

Punctually at the hour appointed he stood in the shadow of the portico waiting for the Countess and Madame Campani.

Carriage after carriage rolled away with clatter and importance, but still she did not come; but as he had almost decided to give the adventure up, at least for that night, he saw her splendid equipage dash up, and in a few minutes he felt that queer sensation at his heart which always warned him of her approach.

She came down the steps looking more beautiful than ever, flushed and sparkling with the homage of the courtiers who thronged round her, eager and anxious to be of some service in connection with her train or bouquet.

As she stepped upon the piece of crimson carpet that lined the way to the carriage he came forward, and with a slight start she said,—

"Senor—captain, we have been waiting. The Count is—"

"Here," said that individual, coming down the steps behind them.

The Countess placed her hand on his arm, and followed, by Reginald Dartmouth they entered the carriage.

The Count, after addressing a few words to the Countess in a voice too low for Reginald Dartmouth to hear, bent forward and said,—

"I have been communicating to the Countess your decision to join us. She is the keystone, the centre piece of the society, and we do nothing without her consent, help and advice."

Reginald bowed.

"You are wise, my lord," he said, significantly. The Countess bent forward.

"The Count tells me you will join us," she said in a low voice that thrilled his heart. "Are you aware of the risk, the danger and the responsibilities that attend us?"

Reginald Dartmouth dropped his voice to attune with hers, and fixed a meaning glance upon her large, dark eyes.

"For the first I know and care nothing; for the last," he said, "I am willing to undertake the heaviest you may see fit to place upon me."

Presently the carriage came to a stop. The Count alighted first and assisted the Countess. As Reginald Dartmouth was about to follow, two men stepped from out the darkness and threw a cloth of some sort over his head, fastening it with the rapidity of constant practice across his eyes so that he was in total darkness.

Before he could resent the action the Countess whispered in his ear,—

"It is a form merely and cannot be broken—even for you. Take my hand up the stairs."

He grasped her hand eagerly with a flush of delight.

"For this," he interrupted, pressing it, "I would lose life itself."

The stairs ceased, and by the sudden glow of heat Reginald Dartmouth knew that he had entered a room.

There was a dead silence for a minute or two, and then a voice said,—

"Now!"

At that moment, obeying the signal, the Count untied the bandage, and Reginald Dartmouth, opening his eyes, saw that he was in a large room draped with dark purple hangings and lit by a candelabrum suspended from the centre of the ceiling, which he noticed—having looked at it with that instinct which moves all men when opening their eyes after a period of darkness to turn them immediately to the object of light—was fitted with an apparatus for extinguishing or rather concealing its lights at a moment's notice.

Round the room were settees of crimson velvet.

Seated on these were about twenty men or women, chiefly Italians, all in evening dress, and apparently just come, like themselves, from concert or ball room.

At the end of the room stood a small tripod, upon which in a small grate burnt a bright fire such as that used by alchemists for the melting of metals in small quantities.

Beside this stood an old oak chair elaborately

carved and ornamented with a motto in Italian, and a heart with a forefinger laid across it.

The door by which they had come seemed the only means of entrance and exit to the apartment, and the captain's quick ears caught the sound of bolts and bars shot into their places at the moment his bandage was removed.

The Count threw away the cloth—which was of black satin and embossed with a skull and crossbones—and walked with stately dignity to the chair.

The Countess seated herself on a fauteuil placed beside it and laid her right hand on its right arm.

All eyes were turned towards the Count.

He rose, and in a musical voice deepened into a tone of command, said,—

"Brethren and sisters of the cause, I bring you to-night a new brother."

All eyes were turned towards the stalwart figure in the centre of the room.

Reginald Dartmouth stood the sharp scrutiny with unchanged impassability.

"It is unnecessary to enumerate the advantages that must accrue to us from his admittance to our order, and I will say only that he is wealthy, courageous and a soldier. We want gold and valour—our new brother brings us both—nay more, he can give us, for I have spoken with him, advice and wise counsel. Brethren and sisters, I am satisfied with him, and will proceed to let him take the oath as usual on a new member joining us."

The whole assemblage bowed in silence. And he took from the hands of the Countess a small wooden crucifix.

It was a rough, worm-eaten relic, and as the Count held it up respectfully every man and woman made the sign of the cross devoutly.

Reginald Dartmouth folded his arms and waited.

The Count approached, and holding the crucifix above his head, said, in low stern tones,—

"I, Reginald Dartmouth, swear by this sacred portion of the true cross, to be faithful and loyal to the Secret Society of Carbonari, to keep secret the names of the members, the deeds thereof, the places and times of their congregation and all matters pertaining to them. I also swear to divulge nothing, however great, however trivial, that may come to my knowledge, by any way, belonging to the working and acts of the society. And this I swear by the true cross, in token whereof I kiss it, and do pledge my life and hope of eternal welfare thereto."

Repeating this after the Count with distinct and solemn earnestness, Reginald took the crucifix in his hand and pressed it reverently to his lips.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LAURENCE HARMAN'S wound had worse consequences than he had anticipated, and two days after, it was still stretched on his bed of leaves.

The panther had not only scratched deeply but had let enough blood to bring about a low fever, and the second night had been spent by Cecil in watching the pain-knitted brow of his companion and listening with tender eagerness to the half-delirious mummings of his parched lips.

Cecil's courage came by fits and starts; just now it was in full vigour. The pale girlish face was set with hard determination and there was a valorous expression shining through the pitying ones of the dark, deep, beautiful eyes.

All night he watched, sleepless and vigilant, never leaving the wounded Laury for a moment save to replenish the fire burning outside the hut door, or to damp the cloth with which he cooled the hot, feverish forehead.

In the morning the delirium ceased, and Laurence opened his eyes to fix them with a questioning, puzzled gaze upon the gentle ones above him.

"Cecil," he muttered, "you here and—ah, I remember. Lad, lad, you should be at the farm. Why did you not go when I told you? You are not well—too weak to be here away from the house."

"I'm better than you at any rate," retorted the youth, with assumed sharpness. "You ought to be in the hay loft. But as you're not you must make the best of it. Pray how do you feel this morning?"

"Shaky and weak," said Laury, with an annoyed smile. "That beast cut deeper than I thought, lad. But we'll be home to-day, please Heaven."

And he raised himself on one elbow, only however to fall again with a groan of pain.

"Lay quiet," said Cecil, anxiously. "Pray lay quiet, there's a good Laury!" he entreated, throwing the skin over him again and smoothing it down. "You have been so ill, so very ill, in the night," he continued, "and you will be worse if you don't keep quite still. Oh, Laury, I do so grieve to see you in pain!"

And the lad's face flushed.

"Nonsense, lad," said Laury, with a smile. "'Tis nothing; the nuisance of lying here and keeping you is worse than the twitching of the scratches. Will you not ride home? Come, lad, do as you're told and return to the farm."

"Not if you threatened to whip me all the way—that's if you were able even," replied Cecil, decisively. "Don't waste breath in asking, Laury, but tell me where I shall find the cup for making some coffee—for I discovered a bag full of it in the corner last night."

And with a cheerful face he ran down to the stream, returned with some water and set it to boil.

Then, forcing himself to hum the rag-end of one of Mr. Stewart's songs, bustled about, though noiselessly, and tidied up the hut.

Laurence watched him with silent gravity for some minutes, then said,—

"Cecil, I'm afraid, judging from my sensations, that I shall not be able to get away from here to-day."

"Tell me some news, Laury," retorted the youth, with a smile.

The other sighed.

"Is it any use asking you to leave me and return alone?" he said.

"Not the slightest, as I have told you a score of times before," said Cecil, decisively; adding cheerfully, "And now I'm going to sit down while you sleep."

"I can't sleep," said Laurence, "but sit down, lad, and give me my pipe."

"Pipe!" said Cecil, looking terrified. "Oh, I'm sure that can't be right. A pipe! why, it would be your death!"

"Nonsense! give me my pipe," said Laurence, grimly.

And, not daring to refuse, the youth reached it from the pocket of his coat and filling it handed it to him in silence.

"That's a good lad again," said Laurence, with a quiet smile. "I was afraid you wouldn't let me have it, and if you'd stood out I'd a had to give in, for you've been too kind to be worried."

"Then I wish I'd stood out," said Cecil.

And he looked half induced to snatch the pipe from Laurence's lips, but sank down upon the ground at his side and gazed thoughtfully through the open door.

There was a placid, serene and mysteriously happy look upon his face, and a sweet, delicious calm in the dark deep eyes that attracted the wounded man's attention and set him thinking.

Fixing his grave, questioning eyes upon him thoughtfully, he said, suddenly,—

"Cecil, are you happy at the farm?"

Cecil turned to him with a start and a rosy flush.

"Yes, Laury," he replied. "Why do you ask?"

Laurence shrugged his torn and bloodstained shoulders.

"Why indeed, lad," he said, dreamily. "I was watching your face and it looked so happy and contented that I asked the question, though your looks made it unnecessary."

"I am happy here, Laury," said Cecil, lowering his eyes. "I could be happier here with you than anywhere else if you were well and in no pain. Poor Laury!"

There was a world of pity in the last words, and something more than pity.

"You are a strange lad," said the cattle-runner, smiling. "A strange lad and somewhat of a puzzle. I'm thinking that the world has served us both badly and driven us here, both of us, rather against our will. But that's neither here nor there—" He broke off curtly, as if he had said too much. "And you are happy at the farm? Cecil, if Stewart asked you to bind yourself to him—for a score of years say—bind yourself to him hand and foot—what would you say?"

"Bound like a slave!" said Cecil, in low, but indignant tones. "No, Laury, that would be base! Who would give up his freedom like that?"

And he turned with a look of innocent wonder upon his face.

Something in Laurence's downcast eyes made him start and turn pale.

"Laury," he said, sharply, "tell me; you have not bound yourself!"

Laurence nodded almost surlily, with still averted eyes.

"Ay, lad," he said. "Why not. I'm happy here—at least I have no trouble and plenty of work, and I can cheat memory here better than elsewhere. Why not? What is to be said against it? Why should I not make certain of a long run of this quiet and harmless life—eh?"

Cecil breathed hard.

"Bound for—how long, Laury?" he asked, turning his dark eyes upon him wistfully.

"Seven years," replied Laurence.

Cecil got up and crept back to the block of wood with a sad, thoughtful face.

"And—that was what you were talking about when I came out of the office the morning we started, Laury?"

"Yes," he said. "The farmer had often asked me to bind myself over to him for seven years, but I had refused. I was uncertain and restless; I thought I might want to dash off here and there, when the fit seized me, and did not fancy being tied to the farm. But—" and he paused and looked meaningfully—"Stewart came in that morning, and, lad, I'm thinking it was on your account I signed!"—and he laughed his short, rare laugh. "I took a fancy to you the first moment I saw you at the Bay, and while the farmer was talking and wheedling I thought 'the lad is young and weak, and helpless; he'll feel strange and lonely with the boys, if the fit seizes me to go. If I sign I can't go, and he'll have a friend here to fight his quarrels until a wild beast pushes me off the board. So I signed.'"

Cecil's face was a study during this confession—for it was little else.

At first it turned paler even than before, a transient flush passed over it, then the eyes seemed to grow larger, to fill and deepen with a wondrous, marvellous tenderness, the lips quivered with some fine, unspeakable emotion; then, as the man's curt, grave voice ceased, the lad covered his face with his hands, silent and overcome.

Before Laury could express his surprise, at the result Cecil seemed to have recovered himself, and, turning to him with a look upon his face that struck Laurence to the heart, said, in thrilling tones,—

"So, Laury, you agreed to be a slave—hush! I will say the word—FOR ME!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

FOR the remainder of the evening Cecil was particularly silent and reserved, attentive and watchful, ever ready with the cold bandage and the broth, but very quiet and thoughtful.

So much so that Laurence was puzzled, and after an ineffectual attempt at conversation, he fell to watching the lad's face with half-dreamy contemplation, and, in a fit of speculation as to the causes that had sent the handsome-faced, soft-voiced lad into the African wilds, fell asleep.

Cecil, who had been waiting for this, rose and covered him with the rug, replenished the fire

outside the hut, and then, after shutting the door, sank down upon the floor beside his head, and gazed long and fixedly upon his weary yet placid and noble-looking face.

Gazing thus, an expression of wistful, indescribable tenderness settled like a cloud upon the youth's face, his lips quivered, his eyes filled with tears, and, as if yielding to an uncontrollable impulse, he bent his head, and suddenly, swiftly, yet lingeringly, touched the hot lips of the stalwart stockman with his own.

Then, as if with shame, he started back and covered his crimson face with his two trembling hands.

As the caress rested lightly on his lips Laurence moved slightly, and the weary look upon his face gave place to a smile of ineffable peace and happiness.

But Cecil's eyes were covered and did not see it.

So the night wore away—Laurence sleeping uneasily and with several starts of unrest—Cecil sitting, or sometimes kneeling, a few moments dozing—but for the most part watching intently, and with the same devouring look, the face beneath him, and feeling—if the eyes are indeed the windows of the soul—supremely and unspeakably happy.

At daybreak Laurence woke, feeling refreshed and much recovered.

The coffee was already boiling, and Cecil bending over the fire, he turned with a smile of greeting as he heard Laurence's movement.

"Good-morning, Laury. How do you feel this morning?"

"Better, lad—nay, well!" replied Laurence, rising.

"The fever has left me entirely," he added, as Cecil looked incredulous. "And saving for a little weakness and the tingling of the scratches, I might fancy these last three days a dream."

And he smiled gravely.

"A very unpleasant one," said Cecil, with a sigh. "Panther wounds and low fevers are not nice nightmares."

"Nor sitting beside a sick man in a solitary hut either," said Laury nodding. "I'm a bad hand at speech making, lad, or I'd tell you, perhaps, something of my gratitude."

"A good thing you are," retorted Cecil. "For I hate talkative men. Now I'm going to water the horses, and you had best get a nap."

But Laurence shook his head, and as soon as Cecil had gone proceeded to prepare for the return trip.

When Cecil came back he found Laurence waiting at the door with saddles ready for slipping on and the skins tied up.

"What now?" he asked.

"Home," said Laurence resolutely. "Not a word, Cecil. I am quite recovered and determined."

Cecil, seeing that remonstrance would be useless, helped saddle the horses, and the two stood at the door while Laurence fastened it.

Before he closed it he looked in with a strange smile.

"The little den looks cheery, lad; I shall always like it after this," he said.

And he sighed.

Cecil turned rather pale, and sighed too.

"Yes, we have not been altogether unhappy, Laury—you and I, and—I'm rather sorry to say good-bye to the 'den,' as you call it."

"Hullo," said Mr. Stewart, coming out to meet them with a relieved smile. "Where have you been to? And—!" with a look of astonishment as he saw the scar upon Laurence's forehead—"and what in the name of thunder have you been up to?"

Laurence frowned.

He disliked demonstrativeness, especially when displayed on his account.

"We have had a tussle," he said, "a mere nothing in which I alone, I am glad to say, was scratched."

"Oh, that's all, is it?" said Mr. Stewart. "Well, I'm glad it's no worse. You look all the better for the trip, C'ey," he added, as the lad dismounted.

"I'm glad of it," said Cecil. "I feel all the better, and so will the books, I hope."

"Ain't you coming in, Laurence?" asked Mr. Stewart, seeing that Laurence did not offer to dismount, and had thrown the skins to one of the negroes.

Laurence shook his head.

"No, thanks," he said. "I will go and see who has the next run, and join in."

Cecil turned back when he saw that Laurence was not following, and caught the last words.

He turned crimson and caught the settler's arm.

"Don't let him—oh! don't let him!" he whispered eagerly. "He's been ill, very ill! down with fever—and—and pray don't let him go!"

Mr. Stewart looked down at his anxious and troubled face with a sharp laugh.

"Don't let him, by George! I should like to know who's to prevent him if he's taken it into his head to go. Here, you can try."

And he jerked his head towards the door.

Cecil ran down the stairs, but turned again with a cry of vexation.

Laurence had already reached the stables, but he was to find the popularity he had never much prized was on the wane.

The stockmen, who had been at first rather pleased with his grim taciturnity and reserve, were growing tired of it, and growled in their beards at his coldness and stand-offishness, and, with a curse at his pride, asked each other who he was to show such airs.

A small flame is easily fanned into a blaze.

From grumbling and growling at Laury's "pride" as they called it, they persuaded themselves into the belief that they were much wounded and hurt at the evident favouritism Mr. Stewart displayed for him.

A group of them, who were in the stables as Laurence entered.

He was accustomed to a hearty greeting, and rather feared and expected a volley of questions; but, to his surprise, they fell into a dead silence as he entered, and—beyond dark and anything but friendly glances—took no notice.

He gave them good-even.

One of them growled out something in reply, the rest remained silent.

Laury sent a sharp, scrutinizing look at the malcontents, and then, without the slightest change of countenance, led the Black into his stall and set to grooming and feeding him as usual.

The men, after a few minutes, walked out, growling amongst themselves.

When he had finished with the Black, Laurence made his way to the house, and found Mr. Stewart in the long room with a cigar in his mouth as usual.

"Ah, so you haven't started," he said. "Sensible for once in a way. Supper's over, but they're getting a bit for you and Cecil."

Laurence thanked him.

"I'll get a crust of bread from Martha as I pass through, sir," he said. "I may as well be off."

"What in the world are you in such a hurry for?" asked Mr. Stewart, testily.

"I am in no hurry," said Laurence, quietly.

"You forget that I have had four days' holiday."

"Which you are welcome to," said the settler, "and you know it."

"I know it, and am grateful," said Laurence.

"Can you tell me the next run? I meant to ask at the stables but the men seem to have caught a tongue-fever. I got no good-night from them even."

"Ah," said the settler, looking troubled.

"What's the matter with them, Laury, do you know?"

Laurence shook his head indifferently.

"They have been like a set of bears with sore heads for the last few days. I don't know what ails 'em."

"Nor I," said Laurence. "Has anything happened here since I have been away?"

"No, nothing," said the settler. "Nothing whatever—at least that I know of. To tell you the truth, Laury," he continued, hesitatingly, and eyeing Laurence askance, "I fancy they have got a grudge or a grievance against you."

Laurence frowned and drew himself up.

"I think you must be mistaken," he said. "I know of no cause for either. Against me? I see little of any of them and avoid all."

"That's it," muttered the old man, inaudibly, but added aloud: "Well, I can't make it out, and I suppose it wouldn't be much use if I could. You'll take care of yourself, I know."

Laurence smiled grimly.

"Yes," he said, simply.

"And so shall I," said the old man, touching his revolver, with a sharp laugh. "Not that I think they've quarrelled with me," he added, quickly. "But it's as well to be prepared. The boys are not sucking doves or spring lambs."

Laurence made no reply, save to ask the next route, and receiving it wished his master "good-night."

Half an hour afterwards he rode away, passing a group who cast a volley of black looks after him.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE next morning Cecil returned to the armoury with a strange sensation of wistful longing in his heart, and flew at the work with an eagerness born of the desire to lose his thoughts in the stock accounts.

As before, he took his meals in the office, and this seemed suddenly to give offence to the men, who, eager for some excuse whereon to hinge their dissatisfaction and ill-temper, seized upon this, and growled still more deeply.

Mr. Stewart was puzzled and annoyed, but as he made it a rule to notice nothing short of open disobedience and rebellion, he took no heed of black looks and mutterings, and went about whistling and humming as usual.

Cecil, upstairs, of course knew nothing of the state of affairs.

At night a detachment, led by Tim—one of the men most opposed to Laurence Harman—started for a run, and Mr. Stewart hoped their work would dissolve the mischief which might have been only bred and fostered by idleness.

The week passed, and the storm seemed to have blown over, but an untoward accident brought it up again darker and fiercer than ever.

The stockmen were supplied with all their weapons by Mr. Stewart. That is to say, each man was started with the usual amount of firearms—gun and revolver, and a long knife—upon arrival at the farm. Ammunition was given out as it was needed.

Generally when a gun or a revolver was stolen or lost Mr. Stewart would replace it, often without a murmur.

Lately, however, the men had acquired an unhappy knack of losing their arms, and the settler, having a not altogether unfounded suspicion that they were disposed of at the Bay for brandy in an underhand way, had declared his intention of stopping the supply, and gave the men to understand that he who lost would have to pay.

This notice was not very well received by any of them—very badly, indeed, by Tim, who had driven a rather flourishing trade at the Bay with his master's long "uns and barkers."

He did not fancy having his pretty little trade stopped, and, as brandy had become almost necessary to his valuable existence, devised a plan whereby he might still obtain it. The plan was to take what would be no longer given. The armoury was well stocked—the key was often unturned. Nothing was easier than to steal upstairs, purloin a revolver from the case, and wait until the next visit to the Bay to dispose of it.

While Cecil had been away he had taken two, and, rendered daring by his success, fully resolved to have some more. Accordingly, on the night of his return, which happened just a week after Cecil's, he shuffled about the house watching for an opportunity. Cecil, who still took his meals in the office, was in the habit of taking a stroll—he never rode—after dinner and supper, sometimes playing with the children in the front.

That night he had his supper as usual, and turning the key in the lock ran downstairs.

Before he had reached the door, however, he remembered that he had left his bedroom door unlocked, and ran up again.

Tim, who had been waiting for his departure, heard him run down, but did not hear him go up again, and, seizing the opportunity he thought had occurred, stole up the stairs.

Cecil had stopped to throw some faded flowers from the cup upon his table, and turning to leave the room caught sight of the cautiously ascending thief.

Curious to know what the man was about he slipped behind the door, and through the crack watched him sharply. Tim, the coast clear, reached the armoury door, and, waiting for a moment to ascertain if all was quiet, coolly turned the key and walked in.

"Hem," thought Cecil. "This is interesting. I'll wait and see the conclusion of Master Tim's game."

At that moment a batch of cattle came home, and the sound of the cracking whips and shouting brought the crimson to the lad's face and startled the thief, who, hastily dropping the lid of the case, hurried out of the room, thrusting a brand-new revolver into the breast of his shirt as he stopped to lock the door.

Cecil saw it all at once, and flushed with rage and indignation. At the moment he was prompted to leap out and confront the thief there and then, but the reflection that Tim would assuredly throw him over the balustrade or stab him with his bowie-knife stopped him, and he waited until the man had reached the bottom of the stairs before he ran after him.

Tim heard his footsteps, and looking back saw by the expression of Cecil's face that he was discovered.

He hesitated for a moment, and then shuffled into the open.

Cecil followed, and scarcely noticing the hurrying and scurrying of the Kaffirs and newly arrived stockmen, caught him up, and with an indignant "Tim, you thief!" laid hold of his arm.

Tim stopped and turned round on him with an oath.

"What's the matter, young 'un?" he growled. "How dare you ask me!" retorted Cecil, indignantly. "You thief! You have stolen a revolver from the armoury!"

Tim's face flushed like a red Indian's, and with a fearful oath he lifted his huge fist to strike the dauntless youth to the ground.

But before he could deliver the blow, which would have undoubtedly laid poor Cecil low, something or some one sprang between them, and with a terrible blow felled the ruffian like an ox.

Cecil looked up and saw Laurence's form towering above him, his eyes all aflame, his hair blown from his forehead, and his broad breast heaving with rage and passion.

Cecil uttered a low cry of mingled gratitude and alarm, and when Tim rose to his feet, wiping the blood from his face, clung to Laurence's arm imploring him not to strike him again, for their iron-like muscles were strained to their fullest tension, and the expression on Laurence's face was ominous and threatening.

The whole affair had but taken a minute in its transaction, but before the next had expired a crowd of stockmen, kaffirs, and children was shouting and pressing round them.

Tim glared for a minute in speechless rage, then ripped out an oath.

"So you're at it again, are you?" he snarled. "You can't keep your hands off, can't you? What do you want to interfere for?" and he made a threatening gesture.

Laurence raised his arm.

"Keep out of my reach, you hound," he breathed, "or I won't answer for myself. You cowardly beast to strike a child! By the heavens above us, I shall kill you if you don't get from out my sight."

It was evident to all that it was only by a severe effort the speaker restrained himself from putting his threat into execution and one or two

of the runners broke through the ring and pulled Tim away.

Then Mr. Stewart ran up breathless and excited.

"What—what's all this about, my boys?" he asked, staring first at Laurence and Cecil and then at the crowd round them.

A score of native voices were raised to tell him, but with a click of the whip he silenced them, and turned to Laurence.

"What's it all about, Laurence?"

Laurence, his face still darkened with heavy threatening frowning, turned sternly.

"I know not," he said. "I came up in time to prevent that hound striking the lad."

And he laid his hand on the white-faced Cecil's shoulder.

Mr. Stewart whipped out his revolver with an oath at the same time.

"By Heaven! I'll shoot him!" he exclaimed. One of the men, a close friend and ally of Tim, stepped in front of him and forced the revolver down.

"Wait a bit, guv'nor," he growled. "Let's hear the rights and lefts of this business. Now then, youngster, what's it all about?"

But Cecil was trembling too much for explanation, and Mr. Stewart would wait for none.

"Get out of my way, Sam," he said, impatiently, "unless you want this bullet for yourself. You can have it you know, by Heavens. Cecil, get you indoors. You too, Laurence. I'll put an end to all this blamed foolery. There's been too much of it lately to please Stewart. Come, clear out, you two," to Cecil and Laurence, "and now let's see whose going to lord it over the Corner while Bob Stewart's alive," and as Laurence, still holding Cecil by the shoulder, walked towards the house, he strode over to the group of runners who were clustered round Tim and evidently prepared to side with him.

Laurence led Cecil into the house, and Stewart soon followed them, his face was dark and troubled.

Looking round to see that no one was within hearing, he drew Laurence aside.

"Laury," he said, "we shall have some trouble with the boys. They're riled—regularly riled."

Laurence paused.

He had not been all this time at Stewart's Corner without understanding the many difficulties which beset his employer; most of the stockmen were wild, lawless characters who had, some of them, left England to evade the arm of the law; Mr. Stewart's will was firm and judicious, but Laury was quite aware that his success consisted in the varied interests of his men; if they once combined together against him at that remote up-country station, he would be as utterly helpless as the captain of a ship whose crew mutinies on the high seas.

The boy Cecil hardly realised the danger at hand; the two men knew it only too well.

"Look here, Laury," said Mr. Stewart, slowly, "I'm with you as far as will goes, but see what it would be, you and I and the lad can't stand against a body of desperate men like Tim and the rest, I tell you they'd burn the place about us before we knew where we were."

Laury's grasp on Cecil's arm tightened.

"There are the natives," he said, slowly.

"Not to be depended on for an hour, ready to obey whoever promises them the most Cape Brandy."

"I see how it is," Laury's voice had a touch of haughty resentment. "We are in your way, Mr. Stewart, you want to be rid of us."

"Don't be a fool," said the settler shortly, "listen to me for we haven't much time to talk. I had a letter last mail from the old country which made me most inclined to cut this concern. There's a man at Cape Town would be only too glad to get a chance of buying it as it stands. I'll give out to these knaves I've sent you and Cecil packing, it's what they want; and having got their own way, they'd be like lambs. You take the chestnut and the black and ride off before I speak to them, make the best of your way to Cape Town and take a letter which I'll give you to Van Ryard, he's one of the 'cutest lawyers there, and it's one of his clients has a fancy for Stewart's Corner. He's a pretty large station of his own

already, and he may bring his own hands with him; anyhow I'll write that he's to come up here prepared to settle business, and that he'd better bring a dozen or so strong fellows along with him."

Laury looked at the settler gravely.

"I will do your commission."

"Don't look so down in the mouth, lad, there's scores of men'll be too thankful to take a fine fellow like you on to their land, and I tell you, Laury, I'll give you the finest reference stockman ever had. As for Cecil, I'd like to take him back to England with me, he's not strong enough for this life; anyway you wait for me at Cape Town and we'll settle up all scores when I come there."

The business did not take long, the letter to Mr. Van Ryan was soon written, a bundle of African bank notes was handed over to Laury for the expenses of the journey, the black and the chestnut were hastily saddled, and the two friends rode off from the place that had been their home for many months, and which when they rose that morning they had had no thought of leaving.

It was a long ride, several hundreds of miles, but the newly-made Cape Railway did not come anywhere near Stewart's Corner; and the two travellers preferred to avoid the few scattered towns and ride through the veldt, they had taken bread and reindeer flesh with them.

At each stream they passed, they refilled their water-bottles, it was the height of the African summer and so it was no hardship for them to sleep out in the open, while their tired horses rested from the fatigues of the day.

Mr. Van Ryan received them very cordially, the client who wished to purchase Stewart's Corner, a certain Naas Zondagh was then in town; he would send for him at once, and he had no doubt he would jump at the chance offered him.

And then, whether from the fatigues of that long, terrible ride, or from the terrors of their flight, Cecil was taken ill with the low, insidious fever so common to the colony, which is called by different names according to the part where the victim resides, Cape fever, Colonial fever, Diamond fever, it all means one and the same thing, a strange disease which saps the strength in a subtle, mysterious fashion, and leaves its victims weak and helpless as children.

Laury proved himself a devoted nurse. He watched by Cecil night and day, he would hardly leave him for necessary repose, and when at last his efforts were rewarded and the patient came slowly back from the gates of the shadow of death his decision was taken—Cecil must return to England; in vain the lad protested, clinging to his friend and begging not to be parted from him.

Laury stood firm.

"You're the only creature I've let myself care for, boy, and I won't let you die before my eyes for want of care. Go home to England, there's plenty of the Boss's money to pay your passage and enough to leave you a few pounds in your pocket to land with."

"And you, Laury, what shall you do?"

"I shall go to the diamond fields, Cecil, and try to make my pile, and if I make it I'll come back to the old country too, and we'll set up together, just you and me."

The boy's bright eyes rested anxiously on Laury's face.

"You've friends over there," he whispered; "they'd wait you if you went back."

"I've no friends in England," said Laury, bitterly. "My father deserted me, the Squire of Dale would scorn me as a stranger, now Laury, though I am his only son."

"The Squire of Dale?" repeated Cecil, and a strange, feverish flush dyed his cheeks.

"Aye, I've kept my secret well, but I am his own son. I was Hugh Darrell in England; and it's only out here I'm Laurence."

From that moment Cecil's objection to return to England ceased; he extracted from Laury a solemn promise that, good fortune or bad at the diamond fields, he would follow his friend to England in a year and a day, and that, as there was no telling where Cecil might be, he would insert a line in the *Morning Post* saying he had arrived

and naming some place where they could meet; and then in a week later the two friends parted, and it seemed to Laury that when the good ship *Thebean* sailed out of Table Bay with the lad Cecil on board, it took his heart too.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE DALE was in a state of bewilderment and confusion.

Aladdin's palace could not have been so beautiful or so quickly erected as the magnificent mansion which had been conjured out of old Squire Darrell's Dale.

The magician Gold had waved his wand over the old Hall, and turned it with a "Heigh, presto, fly!" into a palace.

And now the owner of the magnificent place and enormous wealth it represented was coming down to it, and, what was more, coming down to prepare for a colony of titled and illustrious guests.

Rumour of his magnificence and ostentation as displayed in town had reached the county families round the Hall, and they were all, with one exception, on the *Qui vive* of expectancy, awaiting with feverish anxiety the arrival of the invitations which they were led to expect.

We need scarcely say that the exception was Miss Rebecca Goodman.

Had the new Hall been renovated with plates of gold, and ornamented with tiles of Peruvian silver, had the army of footmen, grooms, coachmen, and stable helps, to say nothing of the host of valets, been multiplied by ten she would have accepted no invitation issued by Captain Dartmouth, the usurper, as she styled him, of the rightful heir—Hugh Darrell.

Nay, more, she had forbidden any one of her domestics to speak his name or that of the new Hall in her presence, and, not content even with unarmed hostility, was eagerly and indefatigably marshalling her unseen and unsuspected forces to fight and if possible oust the high and mighty, the popular and powerful Captain Dartmouth from his inheritance.

The master of the grand place arrived two days before his guests, who included a distant relation old enough to play the part of hostess, and a duchess of brilliant fame, and the first assemblage at the new Hall given in honour of the captain's friends, was a ball opened by the duchess leaning on his arm.

A thousand wax candles, sparkling in costly candlabras, lit up the scene.

"It was magnificent past all belief," simpered her grace in the captain's ear. "Something to be read of centuries hence as fabulous and mythological."

And then as Reginald Dartmouth acknowledged her grace's laudations with a calm, cold smile of pleasure, the magnificent band burst forth with a grand strain of harmony, a sudden cessation of the conversational buzzing came for the moment, and the ball commenced.

Everybody was in raptures. The music was splendid, the floor exquisite, the decorations and the lighting magical.

The ball was at its height, the duchess had danced her allowance of quadrilles, the strains of a waltz were floating through the perfumed air when the Vitzarellia arrived, and Reginald Dartmouth came hastily to receive them and with outstretched hand said, in the voice he knew so well how to render impressive,—

"My dear Count, Madame la comtesse, the honour of your presence beneath this poor roof overcomes me."

The Count was gratified by this gracious reception, and pressed his host's hand with fervent friendship.

The beautiful Countess moved her lovely eyes round the gilded corridor and bent them upon Reginald Dartmouth with a smile that sent the blood coursing madly to his heart.

"Is Captain Dartmouth a magician that he has raised so fairylike a place?"

"No magician Countess, but a slave," he said, with a low bow, and laying his hand, glittering with diamonds, to his heart.

The tilings of the last arrival went round the room like lightning, and when the lovely Countess passed between the lace curtains, thrown aside by a dozen obsequious retainers, and entered the dazzling atmosphere of the ball-room, every eye was fixed on her with the curiosity and interest with which her beauty and wealth had inspired everyone.

The following morning a brilliant cavalcade filed out of the huge iron gates of the Hall avenue.

Anxious to lose no time, the lord and master of the Dale was about to show the woman he loved, the beautiful Countess, the broad lands and wealthy homestead he was ready to lay at her feet.

The Count and about a dozen of the other guests accompanied them, but the Countess's chaperon, Madame Campani, had remained at home.

Laughing and talking gaily, the group of riders galloped across the hills and through the dale.

Not a cloud was on the lord and master's face, and a happy, expectant, triumphant light gleamed in his eyes as he pointed out the various places of interest to the fair woman at his side.

They were well mounted—the new Hall stables were as splendid and well filled as the new Hall cellars and the new Hall coffers—and by careful strategy Reginald Dartmouth managed to engross the Countess's attention with lively sally and sparkling wit, while with subtle finesse he drew away from the group, leaving the Count a little way behind the rest, engaged in controversial politics.

"Come," he said, looking back with a slight smile.

"We have distanced them all, Countess. Shall we trot across the rise yonder? There is a splendid view, not to be equalled in England!"

He bent towards her with eagerness and almost frowned as he saw that her face looked rapt and meditative, and that she turned to answer him with the start of one who had been in thought a hundred miles away from the speaker and the present.

"I—I—beg your pardon," she exclaimed, with a quick smile. "Shall we ride over that hill? Yes, by all means."

And, touching her steed with her dainty jewelled riding-whip, she bounded forward.

Reginald Dartmouth gained her side in a moment, and, dispelling the shadow of disappointment which her rapt, absent look had caused him, commenced pointing out the beauties of the view.

As he turned in his saddle, with his finger outstretched to indicate the line of the Dale estate, he suddenly stopped short, his hands fell to his side, and he turned pale.

The Countess looked at him with astonishment; then, following his eyes, saw that they were on an open carriage ascending the hill, in which were seated a lady and an old woman, both in deep mourning.

"Captain Dartmouth!" she exclaimed "are you ill?"

"I—I—" he commenced, then stopped; and as the carriage approached them lifted his hat.

The lady seated in it, however, averted her gaze, and the vehicle passed on without his salutation having been returned.

Then he turned in the saddle with a sigh.

"No, Countess, I am not ill," he said. "That lady was a dear friend of my uncle's. Her face brought up a flood of painful memories for the moment, and—I pray your pardon—I was overcome."

The beautiful woman was touched, and with a softened voice, said,—

"I understand. May I ask the lady's name?"

"Her name is Goodman—Miss Rebecca Goodman," responded Reginald Dartmouth. "She owns the Warren, the large house we passed just now—and was a dear friend of my uncle."

The Countess inclined her head.

"And the old lady? Do you know her? You see how curious I am. Everything in this beautiful place interests me, even the passers by."

He muttered something about her interest giving him profound happiness, and replied,—

"That was a Mrs. Lucas, formerly housekeeper here, at the Dale."

"I see," said the Countess. "Poor Miss Goodman. She feels your uncle's death still, and, to judge from her face, acutely."

The soft, sympathetic tone, rendered beautiful by the womanly and Italian accent, unaccountably irritated Reginald.

"Oh, she is an old maid," he said, with a half-smile, "and peculiar."

"Not very old," said the Countess. "She has a sweet face."

And she sighed.

Reginald Dartmouth spurred his horse.

Then, as they rode forward, he threw off his sudden gloom and came out in brighter and more brilliant light, but through all his gaiety and high spirits one thought was working and forcing itself through the schemer's subtle brain.

"What is Mrs. Lucas doing with that timid idiot? Can they suspect aught?"

And the dark thought not yet developed into a darker dread would not be dispelled.

(To be continued.)

HOMEWARD BOUND.

—10:—

(Continued from page 441.)

He never knew how he told Honor. There was no elation, no cruel triumph on her beautiful face, but she could not help the intense relief stamped upon it.

The dead man might be the father of her child, but he had been the terror and misery of her life, crushing out its youth and brightness. Only to know she was free from that terrible chain made her light-hearted.

"They said the cablegram had been there over a fortnight," Jim told her; "there may be a letter next mail."

And there was. Mr. Maitland wrote that when he got home he found Roger Warren had reached Sandstone; he had travelled with frantic haste, taking no precautions against the extreme heat. He was seized with sudden illness on reaching his father-in-law's house, and in less than twelve hours he was dead. He never recovered consciousness after his first seizure. No one knew anything about his affairs, and even had he left ample means for his widow she would not have claimed the money knowing the source of his wealth. But still his death gave her one unspeakable boon—freedom! And both Mr. and Mrs. Maitland assured her of a warm welcome if she would return to the colony with Jim and make her home with them.

"No," said Honor, in answer to a question in Jim's eyes, "I suffered too much there. I shall spend my life in England, Jim."

The brother thought of Captain Barry, and wondered if there was any way of passing on the wonderful news to their quondam fellow-traveller; but he had the good sense not to put this into words.

The day after Mr. Maitland's letter came a short and very formal note in which Sir Robert Norman said he desired to make the acquaintance of his nephew and niece. His wife hoped they would spend a week at the Hall, and he would send the carriage to meet any train they selected.

Honor shook her head.

"I cannot go, dear Jim; but you must!"

"Do come too!"

"I cannot. Our uncle is the last person to forgive me for entering his house under a false name, and I cannot go to the Hall as Mrs. Warren while he knows nothing of my marriage."

Jim saw the wisdom of this, and yielded the point. It was certainly a surprise to him to be met at the quiet country station by Captain Barry as well as Sir Robert.

"Where's your sister?" demanded Sir Robert, as they drove to the Hall, "is she too ceremonious to visit unknown relations?"

"Honor would have accepted your hospitality gratefully, sir, only—her husband is dead."

"Her husband!" cried Sir Robert. "Didn't know she had one!"

"It was a miserable thing," said Jim. "It happened three years ago while I was away. My father and his wife forced her into the marriage. Her life has been one of cruel suffering ever since—indeed, it was to hide herself from her husband she came to England with me. She is called 'Miss Norman' at our lodgings. We both thought you would not like her coming to your house under a name no longer her own; and yet to present her to you suddenly as Mrs. Warren seemed impracticable."

"Ah! Marriages all go wrong nowadays," sighed Sir Robert. "There's my girl Vera been as good as engaged to Mowbray here for seven years. He could make her Lady Barry, and give her a home grander than Normanhurst; but she's provoking enough to declare she won't hear of marrying him, and that she means to be an old maid."

"It was a family compact," said Lord Barry, gravely. "Without love on either side, I believe Vera and I shall be better friends now it is off than we have ever been before."

"And you, Jim," said his uncle with something like a groan, "they tell me all Colonials marry young, so I suppose you're engaged to some Africaner!"

Jim shook his head.

"I'm not engaged, Uncle Robert. I've not seen many young ladies, and I always had a fancy if I ever married I should like an English wife."

"Alice," said Sir Robert, in a whisper, when Jim's week was nearly over, "do you know I shouldn't be surprised if that child Vera became mistress of Normanhurst after all!"

Lady Norman glanced to the piano, where Vera was playing Jim's accompaniment.

"It was a case of love at first sight," she said, gently; "but I was afraid you wouldn't hear of it."

"He's a nice lad, and like our family. I think, Alice, it's the most sensible thing I ever heard of for those two to fancy each other."

Jim never went back to Sandstone. There was a very grand marriage at Normanhurst in April, which freed Lord Barry from any risk of having to hand over a hundred thousand pounds to his cousin Vera.

Mowbray did not look in the least like a rejected suitor. He was Jim's best man, and told the bridegroom again and again there was only one other wedding that could have given him more happiness.

That other wedding actually came to pass the following January. It was a very different affair from Jim's—just the quietest possible ceremony in a dull London church. The bride in her travelling dress; no bridesmaids, no guests, no wedding-cake; but for all that Mrs. Johnson declared she had never seen a more lovely bride than the girl who walked down the aisle on Lord Barry's arm.

Mowbray's handsome face was full of a deep intense happiness, while, as for Honor, she only knew that for all time now she belonged to her heart's one love, the man she had first met when they were both passengers on the good ship *Spaniard* HOMEWARD BOUND.

[THE END.]

THE Emperor William's present to Prince Bismarck consisted of a dozen bottles of the famous Steinberg Cabinet of the Great Comet year, which is the finest and rarest wine in the Imperial cellars, and remarkable both for its fragrance and for its strength. The gift is worthy of the occasion, for all such wine is absolutely priceless, and is probably only to be found in the cellars of the Emperor and of the Duke of Luxemburg, except for any stray bottles which may yet be hidden away in a few country houses. The old Emperor William sent half a dozen bottles of the same wine as a present to the Queen in 1887, and it was brought over by the Emperor Frederick (then Crown Prince) himself. Fine Rhenish wines get more and more scarce every year, for there has not been a really first-rate vintage since 1868.

FACETIE.

"WHAT'S the matter with your funny man! Is he mad!" "Oh, no," answered the editor. "He's just out of humour."

"STILL a bachelor, Winters?" "Yes." "Necessity or choice?" "Both. My necessity, her choice."

"SPOONKEY was considerably put out the other night when he went to call on his girl." "How?" "By her father."

FATHER: "Did you get a student lamp, my son?" Son: "Yes, father." Father: "Well, go and buy some midnight oil to use in it."

TEACHER: "Can any of you tell me what is meant by home industries?" Billy Bright (promptly): "Up to our house they're mostly sawin' wood an' carryin' in coal."

THE YOUTH: "Does a man ever get too old to take any interest in life?" The Sage: "Oh, yes. But he generally recovers by the time he is twenty-five."

"WHAT had the boy been doing?"

"Nothing," the answer sped.

"Then why did you discharge him?"

"For doing nothing," he said.

BLICKENS is one of the original members of the Authors' Club, isn't he?" "No," answered the man who sneers. "None of the members of that club are original."

LOUNGE: "There seem to be a good many marriages in spite of the great depression." Sacks: "Yes; it's only when we are depressed that we get reckless, you know!"

"HAVE you had pleasant Christmas holidays?" "Yes; enjoyed myself immensely." "How did you spend it?" "By sending my wife abroad for a month."

"KIND sir, pray give me a shilling for my six hungry children." "Awfully sorry, but I'm not buying hungry children just now; fact is, I've got nine of my own at home already."

TOM: "I can read your thoughts. I know just what you are thinking about now." Daisy (blushing indignantly): "Nonsense. If you did propose I'd refuse you. So there!"

MR. MACSWAT: "Have you packed your trunk yet, Lobelia?" Mrs. MacSwat: "Not yet." Mr. MacSwat (looking at his watch): "Then you haven't any time to lose. The train leaves in exactly thirty-six hours."

COACHMAN: "I am going to leave, sir. I can't stand the missus." EMPLOYER: "Too strict, is she?" Coachman: "Yes, sir. She keeps forgetting that I can leave any time, and bosses me around just as if I was you."

"HAVE you anything to say before we eat you?" said the King of the Cannibal Isles to the pale-faced stranger. "I should like to address a few words to you on the advantages of a vegetarian diet," was the reply.

"I FANCY there must be some mistake about Griggs having been married five or six years." "Why do you think so?" "Why, he looked really pleased when his wife came into the office."

DADSBY: "Doctor, how can sleeplessness be cured?" Doctor: "Well, the patient should count slowly and in a meditative manner five hundred, and then—!" Dadsby: "That's all very well, doctor, but our baby can't count."

NEW BOY: "There is a man outside as wants to see you about a bill." Editor: "Tell him I've gone out of town." (Later): "What did he say?" NEW BOY: "He wasn't in no hurry, and said he could just as well pay it some other time."

A TRAVELLER arrived at an hotel, asked for some hot water. On getting up the next morning he repeated his request. "Why, sir," replied the chambermaid, "I took you up a whole jug full last night. There must be some left."

A SCHOOLTEACHER, who had been telling the story of David, ended with, "And all this happened over three thousand years ago." A little cherub, its blue eyes opening wide with wonder, said, after a moment's thought, "Oh dear, what a memory you have got!"

"Do you mean to say," said one lady to another, "that your husband will get up in the middle of the night to look for burglars?" "Yes." "How did you get him to do it?" "I made him believe I think he is brave, and he thinks that by going downstairs with the poker he is keeping up a very large reputation at a comparatively small risk."

A LONDONER just back from a shooting party is denying the story, but it is true. He had been out all the morning with a boy, who had seen him shoot several times before, and the birds had kept at such a distance that he couldn't get a shot. "Well," he exclaimed in disgust after awhile, "I never saw birds so shy." "I s'pose they don't know it's you, sir," remarked the boy.

A GENTLEMAN who has been travelling in France relates that in Paris the barber who was shaving him stepped two or three times upon the side of his foot. At last the customer called out, "Please don't do that any more! I have a corn." "Exactly what I was trying to find out, monsieur," said the barber blandly. "We have an excellent preparation for removing corns for sale at one franc per bottle."

THEOSOPHER: "Is the editor in?" Editor of Farm and Garden Department: "Well, yes, I am one of them." Theosopher: "Well, I have an article here to which I have devoted much time and research, on 'Esoteric Buddhism.'" Editor Farm and Garden Department: "Yes; well, we are interested in all new methods of building, but isn't it just a little late to treat the subject?"

"WERE you not afraid of losing your life when you were climbing the Alps? There have been so many accidents of late," said one gentleman to another, who had just returned from the Continent, and was telling about his climbing mountains in Switzerland. "I know; but I always feel perfectly safe," replied the tourist. "I make it a point never to pay the guide until we return. That makes him take an interest in my safety which he otherwise would not."

GRANDMOTHER had just passed away, and the clergyman had been in to say a few words of comfort to the sorrowing granddaughter. "Ah, yes," said he, "we should not grieve too much, considering the ripeness of years to which your grandmother had attained." "Autlier year, sir," said the sorrowing granddaughter; "an' we should nae hae mindit it a bit, but it was provokin' to hae her deirin' at ninety-nine. We had so set our hearts on her bein' a cen—cen—turion, an' noo—noo—noo—e—oh—oh, oh!" Astonishment and collapse of clergyman.

It was on the eve of his departure. On the morrow he was to return to the city. They were to part, perhaps for ever. They had wandered down by the brook, and as they sat together on the old seat under the greenwood trees, she was the first to break the stillness of the twilight hour. "I can't bear to say good-by," she sighed. "Promise me that you will come to my wedding." "I promise you—on one condition, that I will come even from the ends of the earth." "What is it?" "Will you grant it before I ask it?" "Yes." "Let me come as the bridegroom!"

A "FUNNY" man went into the Lower Arcade the other morning and saw a notice posted up: "If you do not see what you want, ask for it." He thought he would show how sly he was, so said to the proprietor, "I don't see what I want." "Then ask for it," said the proprietor, loudly, and the twinkle in his eye showed he knew what the festive traveller was up to, but that individual never supposed that a shopman would catch up with him, so he went on, "Well, I've asked all over town for it, and I cannot find one." I have got everything a man can want," said the other, encouragingly. "Well, I have found so many smart men in London that I want to find a first-class idiot." "John," said the smiling merchant, turning to an assistant, "bring me a heavy piece of wrapping paper, and wrap this parcel up," pointing to the funny man. "All right, sir," replied John, as he grabbed the paper and made a rush for the man. But he was gone.

SOCIETY.

THE Duke and Duchess of Connaught become more and more popular as their time of residence at Aldershot goes on.

THE Royal yacht about to be built at Cowes for Prince and Princess Henry of Battenberg is to be called the *Asphodel* (or the *Day Lily*).

THE Duke and Duchess of York are not going to Osborne, as was originally intended, but will visit the Queen at Windsor Castle during the last week in February.

THE trousseau of Princess Victoria Melita is mostly to be purchased in London of the same tradespeople who furnished Princess Marie with her outfit.

THE Russian Emperor's eldest daughter, the Grand Duchess Xenia, has been betrothed to the Grand Duke Alexander Michaelovitch, fourth son of the Grand Duke Michael-Nicolaievitch.

THE Princesses Victoria and Maud of Wales would long ago have been married but for their intense attachment to their mother and their English home, and their corresponding distaste for the idea of "settling" in any other country than their own native land.

THE Princess of Wales will go into society to a reasonable extent during her residence at Marlborough House next season, which will be from the third week of May until the end of July, after which she is going to Denmark on a long visit to her parents.

HEN Royal and Imperial Highness the Duchess of Coburg gave to her eldest daughter a singularly beautiful and extensive trousseau, and intends that her second daughter shall be equally well supplied, for the bride and groom are to visit many august relatives after their marriage, including our own Queen.

THE Prince of Wales will be the guest of the Earl and Countess Cadogan at Culford Hall, in June next, for the meeting of the Royal Agricultural Society at Cambridge. The Prince has made many engagements for the forthcoming weeks, and intends to be at Cannes in March, when his Royal Highness's beautiful yacht, the *Britannia*, will be sent out there.

THE Duke of Cumberland has asked the Princesses of Wales and the Princesses Victoria and Maud to pay him a visit at Gmunden, in Upper Austria, when they leave the sunny shores of the Grecian Isles. The Duchess of Cumberland (Princess Thyra of Denmark) will, of course, give the English Princesses a hearty welcome.

IT is believed that the betrothal of Princess Alix of Hesse, the bridegroom-elect's only unmarried sister, will shortly be announced, and the Czaritch is mentioned as her fiancée. Princess Alix has lived with her brother since her father's death, and is very deeply attached to him. One of her sisters is married to one of the Czaritch's uncles, so that if this arrangement does come off, Princess Alix will be niece by marriage to her own sister.

THE rumours that the mind of the Princess of Wales is unhinged, as was the case with her sister, the Duchess of Cumberland, are altogether false, but she is afflicted with an intense melancholy. Her Royal Highness is particularly anxious to go to Egypt, but it is very unlikely that she will be permitted to gratify this wish. It is satisfactory to know that her son and daughters are devoted to her in her sadness and gloom, and it is said, that the Duke of York is as tender and attentive to his mother as if he were a daughter instead of a son. The Princess has to a considerable extent withdrawn from society ever since the death of the Duke of Clarence; but she would have attended this season's Drawing Rooms if the state of her health had not rendered it advisable for her to pay another visit to Italy and Greece. The Princess of Wales has not attended a single ball since her eldest son's death, and a year ago she intimated her intention of not going to any function at which there was to be dancing, so that she was not seen at either of the State Balls last season, and the proposed winter balls at Sandringham were abandoned because the Princess objected to them.

STATISTICS.

EUROPEAN Navies employ 300,000 men.

IN making the average trip round the world a traveller covers about 22,000 miles.

TWO-THIRDS of the gold now in use in the world was discovered within the past fifty years.

THE earth, travelling at the rate of 1,000 miles a minute, passes through 530,000,000 miles of space in the course of a year.

IT is estimated that the sunflower plant draws from the soil and exhales, in twelve hours, twelve ounces of water.

GEMS.

A SMALL mind has usually plenty of room for pride.

A KIND "no" is often more agreeable than a rough "yes."

KNOWLEDGE is a tool with which to acquire more knowledge. The increase is as in multiplication.

HE who refuses to do justice to the defenceless, will often be found making unreasonable concessions to the powerful.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

HOT LEMONADE.—Almost every one knows that hot lemonade is one of the best things for breaking up a cold. Take it when going to bed. Put the juice of two lemons into a pint of boiling water, and boil one minute. Sweeten to the taste and drink as hot as possible. Sometimes it is well to have it diluted with a cup of boiling water.

QUEEN CAKES.—Three eggs, four ounces butter, six ounces sugar, two tablespoonfuls of milk, six ounces flour, one teaspoonful essence of lemon, a few currants, three-quarter teaspoonful baking powder. Butter some queen cake pans, and sprinkle a few dry, clean currants in the bottom of each. Put butter and sugar in a basin, and beat to a cream with a wooden spoon, then drop in the yolks of the eggs, one by one, beating each thoroughly; add the baking powder and essence of lemon; beat the whites very firmly, and add them last. Three-quarter fill the pans, and bake in a moderate oven about a quarter of an hour.

CHEESE CAKES.—Scraps of puff paste, half pound flour, two ounces butter, four ounces sugar, two eggs, half teaspoonful baking powder, half teaspoonful essence of lemon, two tablespoonfuls milk. Butter and line twelve small patty pans with scraps of puff paste rolled out an eighth of an inch thick, then prepare the following mixtures:—Put butter and sugar in a basin and beat them to a cream, then add the eggs one by one, and beat thoroughly; then add the milk, then the flour, baking powder and essence, and give all a good beating; put a small spoonful in each pan; cut a narrow strip of paste and twist it on top; put in a quick oven and bake quarter of an hour.

PLUM PUDDING.—Two ounces orange peel, quarter pound bread crumbs, quarter pound flour, quarter pound suet, half pound currants, half pound blue raisins, one breakfast cup milk, three eggs, one lemon, six ounces sugar, pinch salt, two teaspoonfuls spice, half teaspoonful nutmeg, quarter teaspoonful baking soda. Chop the suet, stone the raisins, wash and dry the currants, grate the lemon rind (just the yellow outside of it), and squeeze the juice out among all the dry ingredients; beat up the eggs, and pour the milk among them; pour this in and mix all well, put in a greased shape, cover with paper, put into a little boiling water, cover over the pan very closely, and steam at least four hours; serve with warm, sweet sauce.

MISCELLANEOUS.

IN France it is illegal to capture frogs at night.

THE smallest bird in the world is the golden-crested wren.

THE flowering of the bamboo in Bengal is regarded as an omen of famine.

THE Tartars take a man by the ear to invite him to eat or drink with them.

IN the Royal Aquarium of St. Petersburg are fish which have been on exhibition for 150 years.

A SPONGE having a circumference of five feet six inches has been taken from the waters of Biscayne Bay, Florida.

THE most ambitious wharf on the Pacific coast is at Santa Monica, California. It reaches out into the ocean nearly a mile.

MOSS grows thickest on the north side of hills, and a sun-exposed tree has its largest limbs on the south side.

WATER alone has been known to sustain life fifty-five days. If only dry food were taken, death would result in a quarter of that time.

AMONG the peasants in many parts of the Continent children born at the time of a new moon are supposed to have a special gift of oratory.

AFGHAN chroniclers call their people Bani-Israel, the Arabic for "children of Israel," and claim descent from Saul, the first Israelitish king.

STEPHANIE, as daughter of the King and Queen of the Belgians and widow of the Crown Prince Rudolph, claims the highest precedence after the Empress. Prince Hohenlohe only hesitates to give it to her from a fear of offending the Archduchess Charles Louis. This lady is one of the five daughters of Dom Miguel, the Legitimist Pretender to the throne of Portugal.

MARRIAGE in Spain takes place by day or at night, according to the fortune of the young people or their station in life. If well to do the ceremony comes off in the early part of the morning. The bride wears a plain black silk dress, with train, and a lace mantilla. The bridegroom wears a dress coat. At an early hour, before the bridegroom arrives, the bride repairs to the church with her mother for confession. Meantime the bridegroom, also accompanied by his padrone, or best man, has gone to confession at his own parish church. The marriage ceremony then takes place in the presence of the relatives and friends of the parties. The service in a measure recalls that of the English church. There are two wedding rings—one for the bride and one for her consort. When the man says, "With all my worldly goods I thee endow," he pours sixteen coins into the hands of the bride. This money is called *las arras*, and the bride does what she likes with it. King Alfonso gave splendid gold "ounces" to each of his wives, and these in turn gave them to the poor.

ONE of the greatest cures at the sanitariums established all over the country is the simple sun-bath, which very few people really appreciate. The solar heat gives to the whole system a strength and vigour which no nourishing food can impart. It is so essential to our health and happiness that when it is taken away from us we become weak, puny, and ghastly pale. When winter is over most town people are weak, run-down, and pale, but when they go out into the warm sunlight again, new strength and health quickly come to them. The sun-bath is absolutely essential. Take it every day. Cut down the trees that are so close to the house that they obscure the sun, and have every living-room flooded with light. If one is forced to stay indoors all day, try to get near the sunny window where the full effects of the sunlight can be felt. It will cure neuralgia, nervousness, faintness, weakness, and a dozen other complaints. It will give colour and beauty to the complexion by making the blood better and purer. The purest and prettiest complexions are those which are wind-swept and sun-browned during the summer-time, and not those which come from a dark room.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

ROSE.—Inquire at your public library.

IN DISTRESS.—We never advise in such cases.

DURIOUS ONE.—The clergyman will arrange all that.

SILLY MILLY.—There is not a leap year now till 1896.

INQUISITIVE ONE.—Mirrors were first made in Germany.

WREATHFUL ROSE.—You had better see a lawyer on the subject.

ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—No responsibility rests on the landlord.

A CONSTANT READER.—We have no information on the subject.

FREDDY.—You do not say what sort of stuff it is made of.

FOOLISH HENRY.—The mermaid is a mere poetic creation; she has no real existence.

A PERPLEXED READER.—Husband takes half of it, and the other half goes to wife's nearest relatives.

WEAK SIGHTED ONE.—You must have your eyes properly tested for glasses.

O. R.—Such patients, if paupers, are taken charge of at the parish infirmary.

A VERY OLD SUBSCRIBER.—The distance from Liverpool to New York is 3,016 miles.

JULIAN.—If it is not freehold, the sons and daughters share equally.

A FIVE YEARS' READER.—Business addresses are not given in this department.

TOMMY TUCKER.—From Liverpool to Adelaide, via the Cape, is about 11,500 miles.

A BASHFUL YOUTH.—Ordinarily a cordial bow will suffice for a greeting.

E. C.—The Shah of Persia visited Birmingham on July 10 and 11, 1889.

ROBERT.—Anyone can act as assistant; it is not necessary to be a law clerk at all.

W. P. R.—Diamonds were first discovered at the Cape in March, 1867.

GLADYS.—Eat dinner with gloves on, not so meat teas, the latter are not full dress functions.

JANIE R.—If a wife earns money it is her own, and so is whatever she may buy with it.

D. D.—Quite useless to attempt it. You cannot restore scratched and torn leather.

CONSTANT SUBSCRIBER.—A step-father is not called upon to support a stepchild after the mother's death.

TROUBLED ONE.—We think under the circumstances the landlord should make the tenant some allowance.

W. O. R.—A husband may apply to the courts for an order for the restitution of conjugal rights.

ALICIA.—You can buy it cheaper than you could make it up in the small quantity you want.

ROBEK.—You will require an Inland Revenue license for armorial bearings, costing one guinea a year.

IN WANT OF ADVICE.—We cannot make a selection for you, having no idea whatever of your personal predilections.

R. F.—We can only refer you to the office of the High Commissioner for Canada, Victoria Chambers, 17, Victoria-street, London.

STANLEY.—If you are in arrears of rent, and there has been a distraint, you had better come to an arrangement.

JOAN OF ARC.—A marriage in church is very unusual in Scotland; the customary thing is either to go to the minister or to have him come to the parties.

ADAM.—If there is nothing in the will to the contrary, the younger son takes the share of property that would have gone to the second younger, now deceased.

JACK.—License holders, except licensed innkeepers, require a billiard and bagatelle license. Neither money nor money's worth must be played for.

H. W.—Regarding South Africa generally, it is healthy, and in a hopeful state; but no one can go there who possesses less than £25.

ANXIOUS ONE.—She is not obliged to give a receipt, so that the man should provide himself with evidence of payment.

IVY.—The shrinking or otherwise will depend on the quality of the cloth, of which, of course, we know nothing.

FLOWY C.—We consider coffee best. You can make it very strong, but some prefer tea as it gives a more decided hue.

EDNA.—Floral screens, it is said, make a particularly pretty background if a low chair is placed in front of one of them.

JIMMIE.—The first printed books were hymns and psalters, and being printed only on one side, the leaves were pasted back to back.

SIMON SIMPSON.—While making a call upon a young lady you may retain the glove you have removed from one hand in that of the gloved one.

IGNORANT ONE.—The generally accepted pronunciation of Lobengula is with the accent on the first and third syllables, the "g" being sounded hard.

FISHERMAN.—It requires a good deal of skill and long practice to attain proficiency. A book of instructions can be obtained at most angling shops.

L. H.—Vellum was introduced early in the fifteenth century, and was stamped and ornamented about 1510. Leather came into use about the same time.

INO.—If it can be proved that the statements made on oath by the witness are false his evidence will be rejected, and he will be prosecuted for perjury.

ANXIOUS MATER.—Children who are dressed in white clothes, medical men declare are more susceptible to colds and infectious diseases than those clad in dark, warm colours.

MISERABLE MARTHA.—A false declaration of age or of parents' consent made by one of the parties does not invalidate a marriage; but the person who makes the false declaration may be prosecuted.

YOUTHFUL BRIDE.—A newly married couple have no right to expect calls from their acquaintances to whom wedding-cards had not been sent, unless the omission or neglect shall be satisfactorily explained.

IN A GARRET.

Through the panes of a garret window,
All night the curious stars
Peered anxiously, but they could not see
Between the window bars.
And the moon, like a Sister of Mercy,
Glanced, also, into the gloom,
But her pitying gaze was shut and barred
From the dark and silent room.

For the frost, with delicate fingers,
And tints which the wind ingrains,
Leaned out from the roof, and wrought his wool
All night o'er the window-panes.
Jealous of moonbeam and starbeam,
He first a dim film drew,
Like the breath of a ghost, adown and across,
With soft strands silvered through.

Then the prettiest pictures he painted,
Of Alpine river and glen,
Of islands and capes, and monstrous shapes
As were never beheld by men.
But the best of all seemed a valley,
Soft and fair as a dream,
With two white slabs laid side by side
On the bank of a running stream.

Oh! the Frost is kindly, though jealous,
And in vain the moon and stars
Crowded up to look, he would not brook
One peep through the window bars.
But the winter sun rose grandly,
Melting away the gloom,
And turned his strong and burning eye
Into the silent room.

The secret the Frost had guarded
Was there laid bare and wide;
The form of a young man lay on the couch,
And a woman knelt by his side.
A son and a widowed mother,
And over the bare mean floor
The sunshine flowed till it clasped them both,
But it never will rouse them more.

Untold their simple sorrows,
Of their struggles night and day;
Nameless, unknown, they had lived alone,
And alone they had passed away.
But I know of a valley churchyard,
Soft and fair as a dream;
With two white slabs laid side by side
On the bank of a running stream.

N. D. U.

A READER WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—The meaning of the Latin words "inter alia" is "among other things"; as, for instance: "The speaker referred 'inter alia,' to the flood," &c.

IRENE NAOMI.—The initials "T.T.L." in the corner of an invitation card stand for "To take leave." The initials "P.P.C."—Four pence conf—are more usually substituted.

BIDDY.—Equal parts of flour and finely powdered salt, well heated in an oven and thoroughly rubbed into the fur, which should afterwards be well shaken to free it from the powder.

WALTER WALKER.—Extended Birmingham took in parts of Worcestershire and Staffordshire, but by the provisions of the extension order these are now included in Warwickshire.

S. R.—Premier cannot create peers; that is the prerogative of the Crown, but Premier can recommend the creation, and give reasons for it at the same time submitting list of names.

MINNIE.—It is not "an understood thing" that the first month of domestic service is "on trial." If the servant does not suit you, she is entitled to a month's notice which may be given at any time.

BUSTARD.—We hardly see the drift of your question, perhaps you anticipate a danger? It would not be strong to do as you suggest, but we think it would be best to avoid it.

CELESTINE.—Toasted cheese and glasses of milk stand high in the list of indigestible foods; a bit of new cheese untoasted may be taken with advantage at dinner or breakfast occasionally, and milk is safe if slightly warmed.

A MARTYR.—Wear broad, well-fitting boots, woollen socks, and wash the feet each night at bed-time in hot water to which alum has been added; dry well and dust on finely powdered boracic acid; change socks daily.

EDITHA.—The object of society people should be to make themselves agreeable to all they meet, and this could not be accomplished if they indulged too frequently in the use of phrases not understood by the majority of those present.

BLUSH ROSE.—If you would enjoy society as it exists, and play your part in it without exciting mortifying criticism, we suggest that you read standard works on the subject, and when in company pay close attention to the usages which govern it.

MARION.—Ladies should attire their selves in accordance with their age, and all affectation in dress should be scrupulously avoided. Above all, dress according to your circumstances, and try to appear unconscious of being more than ordinarily gowned.

CLARA E.—Possibly removing from frames and gently washing them over with a lather of mild soap and water, and removing all trace of soap with clean water, will brighten them up sufficiently. If so, when dry pass a slightly oiled cloth over them, and replace.

B. J. M.—It is stated that the unique psalm-tune called "The Old Hundred," of which you ask the origin, first appeared in Calvin's "French Psalter," published at Geneva in 1543, as the proper tune to the 134th Psalm. Guillaume Franc was the musical editor of this work.

P. M. J.—"Flat foot" is not ricketty, though it owes its existence also to weakness; the only cure is to keep the feet well swathed in bandages, to walk moderately while the cure is progressing, and to do all that is possible to get up system, both by good nourishing food, plenty of milk, and invigorating sea air.

PATRICIA.—Your question is a delicate one to answer, as we are afraid our advice will not be acceptable. It is no use trying to deceive your parents as they are sure to hear of it sooner or later. This is a matter entirely for yourself to decide, but you are both very young and could well afford to wait a year or so before being formally engaged.

ANXIOUS READER.—It indicates faulty circulation of the blood, and the best way to counteract it is to do all in your power to keep yourself in good health, or by a daily morning bath, a sponge to waist, and rough-rub afterwards, ample outdoor exercise, avoiding "heavy" foods, especially late suppers; retiring early, and taking care that sleeping apartment is always fresh.

P. S. O.—A mixture of one part Portland cement, three parts clean, sharp sand and two parts fine gravel mixed with warm or cold water to the consistency of stiff mortar, makes a good and durable foundation. A finish coat may be made of cement and sand in equal quantities. This may be made somewhat thinner than the foundation mixture. It is a good plan to mix a little and try before using.

GABRIEL.—The statute English acre contains 4,840 yards. The Irish acre is larger than the English, inasmuch as 121 Irish acres are equivalent to 196 English acres. The Scottish acre is also larger than the English, 48 Scottish acres being equal to 61 English acres. There are also local measurements of land in various parts of England, such as the Cheshire pole of eight yards.

AURA.—Two cups cold water, one tablespoon honey, one tablespoon soft soap, one glass alcohol. Mix and shake up well; lay the satin, a piece at a time, on a table, sponge both sides with the preparation, rubbing it well in, then shake it about and up and down in a tub of cold water, flap it as dry as you can, and hang up by an end but don't wring it. When fit to iron do it on the wrong side while very damp.

R. C.—It is impossible to say in a paragraph the respective strengths of England, France and Germany. One has more of one class of ship, and one of another class. Then the number of guns must be considered, and the number and efficiency of the men. Experts must judge of the respective naval strengths of these countries. You may see some statistics on the subject in the Statesman's Year Book, at the public library.

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